HIS REVERENCE—
HIS DAY'S WORK

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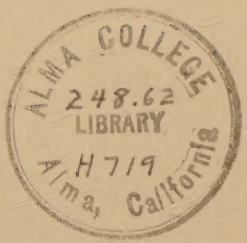
BY

REV. CORNELIUS J. HOLLAND, S.T.L.

Author of "The Divine Story," "The Divine Twilight"

With an Introduction by

AGNES REPPLIER



NEW YORK

BLASE BENZIGER & CO., INC.

1921

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✠PATRICK J. HAYES, D.D.
Archbishop of New York

NEW YORK, September 23, 1921.

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TO

THE DEAR MOTHER OF MY LORD

THE VIRGIN MOST PRUDENT

AND

THE QUEEN OF THE CLERGY

THIS VOLUME

WITH FILIAL LOVE AND DEVOTION

IS REVERENTLY INSCRIBED

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INTRODUCTION

LAYMEN seldom write successfully about priests. I do not mean to say that great ecclesiastics, whether saints or sinners, have not been analysed as exhaustively and relentlessly as great civilians. We know all there is to be known about Bernard of Clairvaux and Cardinal Richelieu. I mean that poets and novelists rarely get beyond the superficial traits of priesthood. Mr. Henry Harland's Cardinal (he who lost and found an invaluable snuff-box) is charmingly portrayed because the author knew just when to stop portraying. It is the deftness of the touch, no less than the clearness of the outline, which gives artistic value to this sketch. The priest of Catholic fiction, impossibly wise and improbably benignant, is as remote from humanity as is the priest of Browning's lurid verse who utilizes the confessions of devout female penitents to entrap political offenders.

The following records of priestly life in this comfortable and tolerant land, records as simple as they are frank, and as homely as they are devout, cannot fail to be interpretative to

the laity. The book is neither polemical nor spiritual, neither pragmatic nor apologetic; but narrates the ordinary happenings of ordinary clerical life. It declines to concern itself with the disputes of nations or of theologians. It tells why priests do not like public meetings and social gaieties, why they do like the companionship of other priests, why they are ill at ease in a theatre, and happy at a ball game, why they buy books, and passionately covet foreign travel. It waxes humorous over such trials as inevitably await them:—the need of raising money, and the weariness engendered in the souls of congregations by the perennial nature of this need; the complicated relationship between a priest and the lay organizations of his parish; the peculiar unreasonableness of cemetery lot-holders, who think their family graves are ill-cared-for, which is probably true, and that the Church is making a good thing out of burials, which can be easily and sadly disproved.

There is a more serious side to the book, and some plain words of counsel—notably in the letter on confession. The sacrament of penance is the field in which the light of Divine Guidance oftenest asserts itself. Every

thoughtful Catholic has realized more than once in his life that the wisdom of the priest in the confessional bears no relation to his general knowledge or intelligence. He is wiser than himself, and it is well for his penitent that this is so, for to him belongs the deep discouragement which an intimate acquaintance with human nature drags in its wake. Cardinal Manning was not the only confessor who has asked himself drearily why it is "that people should be so good, and yet no better; that they should have so few faults, but so few excellencies; that they should be so blameless, yet deserve so little praise." There is nothing more terrible to contemplate than the slightness of the connection between pious practices and a noble life.

The world is not ruled by reason, or by numbers, or by organized attack and defence. We set store by these things because they control activities which can be counted up in votes. But when we compare nation with nation and century with century, we know that the only thing which permanently triumphs is character, the only thing to which the soul of man reacts is the goodness which cannot be denied.

AGNES REPPLIER.

HIS REVERENCE—HIS DAY'S WORK

I

BEFORE AN OPEN FIRE

My dear Prudenzia:

Have you ever read Ik Marvel's book, "The Reveries of a Bachelor"? No, I dare say you have not; not, at least, in its old edition, and it is the old edition that suggested my query: not because of any difference in the text, but on account of the frontispiece—one of those eloquent old woodcuts (now, like old simple courtesy, sadly out of fashion), of a man seated before an open fire, his chin in his hand, his eyes bent upon the blazing logs, his whole attitude indicative of complete oblivion to everything, save the thoughts and images that are fashioning themselves from the fabric of the flames. Well, *that man's me!*

It is Sunday evening, one of those evenings of early fall when it is still too soon to light the furnace and yet too cold to sit comfortably in a heatless room. My day's work is done (how well, the good Lord will tell me later) and I, seated in my big chair before the fire, watch the blaze, whose gentle warmth cheers my heart and heightens the glow of satisfaction which I feel with myself and all the world. Isn't that a blissful state? There are persons, no doubt, who have had a gayer, livelier, more demonstratively joyous day, but few, I think, for whom its close brings a sweeter feeling of contented happiness.

Priests have many evenings such as this (though all have not the glowing fireplace that is given to me)—evenings when, the day's work done, and the office bell silent, they are free to devote themselves to those private occupations wherein their souls find rest. I wonder if other people relish such hours as do Priests? Some may, no doubt—individuals here and there; but, as a class, I think, none. For the men who are drawn to the priesthood are, for the most part, those who, by natural inclination, take deepest satisfaction in the

pleasures that come with being alone. And if there be some who have not the inclination naturally, they are almost certain, in the course of time, to develop it. For the Priest, like his Divine Model, in speaking of whom it was said, "Every man returned to his own house, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives," sees the people with whom he has been dealing during the day returning, as the day declines, each to his own family circle, leaving him alone; and he finds it his lot, even in the busiest parish, to spend the greater number of his evenings in solitude. And on the passing of those hours depends to a great extent the quality of his whole priesthood. For at other times he is fashioned, more or less, by his very duties; in these, he may be said to form himself.

How does he pass them? Well, that is a suggestive question, and I shall try to answer it, at least partially, in my next letter. But just now I shall confine myself to telling you how I myself intend to pass them, or, at least, some of them. Indeed, it was with this idea in mind that I started out to write this letter.

You may remember that when we were last speaking together, you expressed something

like condemnation of Father Blank because he did not accept your invitation to attend a reception given by your club to the Mayor-elect. Well, on thinking the matter over afterwards, the thought came to me of how far you are from appreciating the priestly point of view—not only as regards the reception, but also as regards many another matter; for often before I have noticed how some act or failure to act on the part of a Priest would call forth from you a gentle expression of wonder, if not of protest. So, realizing your deep reverence for the priesthood, and your keen interest in all things relating to it, I have decided to reveal to you, insofar as I am able, the Priest's attitude towards the various phases of his ministry. This I shall do in a series of letters. Some of the letters, I daresay, may be didactic, others trivial, others commonplace, and all more or less dull, still I shall try my best, and in doing so I shall be finding occupation for those solitary evening hours above referred to. Hence, as you read the letters you may imagine me as I am at this moment, seated in my big arm-chair before the glowing grate, the only noise the ticking of the clock, the cheeping of my pen as it scratches its way across

the paper, and the occasional buzz of a passing automobile—the while in my heart and soul there reigns a blessed feeling of contented peace and happiness.

FATHER SPERINDE.

II

EVENING HOURS

My dear Prudenzia:

Here goes for at least a partial answer to the question evolved in my last letter—How do Priests generally pass their solitary evening hours? But first, as a kind of preface, let me tell you, "just between ourselves," that the word "evening" is here used only for the sake of euphony. The word should be "night"; for Priests, as a rule, are confirmed "owls." Few of them get to bed before eleven and a great number wind not their alarm clocks until well after midnight—and this, notwithstanding the fact that for the five years in the seminary they were trained to retire at nine-thirty. Would you take this as a proof that staying up late is a human instinct that no amount of training can eradicate? If so, you would err; for the priestly practice of staying up late is itself the result of training—a training that began immediately after the seminary training

ended. We will suppose that a young Priest, fresh from the seminary, is sent to a large city parish—his usual appointment. He proceeds, at the outset, to carry out his exemplary seminary practice of retiring early, and turns out his light at ten. (He could not turn it out sooner, because the parish house does not close to visitors until that hour.) Hardly has he begun to enjoy the first-fruits of that much-praised beauty sleep, when *r-r-rang* goes the night bell—a sick-call (for our good people will insist on refusing to get anxious over the condition of a patient until the stillness of the night has continued long enough to act upon their nerves); and it is well towards midnight before he turns off his light for good—if it is for good. After this happens a few times, our young Priest decides "not to take a chance," but to wait until at least eleven before settling himself for the night. And it is not long before he is landed in the "owl" class.

And now to the question, "What does he do with himself?" Oh! many things. However, his most common occupation is, I daresay, reading; and I feel certain that were you to drop in at almost any rectory at this hour (it is now after 10 P. M.) you would find the

Priest, seated in his favorite chair, puffing contentedly at a pipe or cigar, and browsing over a book or magazine, for Priests are voracious readers. As an illustration in point I might mention a Priest who, in the evenings (or nights and early mornings) of one winter, read the whole of the Waverly novels; or another who, in the course of a single Lent, ran through the five volumes of Gibbons' "Decline and Fall"; or better still, I might call attention to the very existence of Catholic publishing houses. The publishers of Catholic literature will tell you that, as a general thing, our Catholic laity do not read—at least not Catholic books (and more's the pity!)—and that were it not for Priests, who are forever purchasing their volumes, they could not live a single year. Go to the room of any Priest, even the newly ordained, and you will find that its chief ornament, its most prized possession, is a library, small as it may be, but ever growing, and growing often as a result of genuine self-sacrifice; for the money spent in purchasing books has often meant the foregoing of other things that were greatly to be desired. What is the character of the books? Oh! they are of all kinds: theology, scripture, apolo-

getics, history, romance—from the recent Code of Canon Law to the novels of Joseph Conrad —because everything in the book line is grist to the Priest's reading-mill, that is, everything worth while; for Priests, I may say without exception, abominate that class of literature which, like a foul stream, is now issuing from the press.

Next to reading I do not know just what I should put as the most popular occupation of Priests in their solitary evening hours. It varies with the individual. Some develop a special talent; it may be music—the piano, the violin, or the 'cello. (I never heard of one who took up the bass drum.) Others occupy themselves with acquiring languages—languages that will help them in administering their polyglot parishes, French or Polish, or Italian. This is often done by means of the language-phone; and you may imagine Father Blank, lesson-book in hand, seated in the front of his "machine," the while the record grinds out its strident, "Che-voul-Ella; Che-voul-Ella-fare; Che-voul-Ella-fare-questa; Che - voul - Ella - fare-questa mattina;" and so on, ad infinitum it would almost seem.

Still others take up the time with correspond-

ence, not the correspondence of business—that is done in the morning—but with friends. Indeed, one of our recent writers on priestly living recommends this practice. But the number who fall in with it is much smaller than you might imagine. For Priests, as a class, are not given to social correspondence. Indeed, aside from the regular letter (or I might say, the irregular letter) home, there are many who scarcely ever write. They condemn themselves for their course; they behold, with regret, how, on account of it, friends for whom they entertain a deep and abiding affection drift out of their lives. Still, they do not change. I know Priests who are absolutely devoted to each other, who, were the occasion to demand, would be willing to make great sacrifices for each other, who will make long journeys to visit each other, who will go on vacations together—and yet who will allow weeks and months to go by without ever exchanging a line. Priests will labor in a parish for years, and in the course of that time will form kind and friendly relationships with many of their parishioners; but, when the time comes, they will go to new fields of labor, and never send back a written word. There are

Priests who go further. They do not even acknowledge invitations, but after allowing them to remain for days and days upon their desks end by throwing them into the waste paper basket. These last you will no doubt heartily condemn; and they themselves will, in all likelihood, admit that they deserve to be condemned; still they persist in their evil course. Just how to account for the attitude is not easy; for Priests are both by nature and training courteous and gentlemanly. No doubt it is partly due to a feeling that many Priests have of being "out of the social whirl" and therefore excused from the observance of social form (and it would seem that the greater number of people do excuse them); but it is chiefly due to the way in which they come to look upon their parishes. They regard them as their all in all—home, family, work, recreation, life; and no unrelated matter is allowed to take up time or attention. (In view of this, I wonder if you would declare their course to be a vice or a virtue.)

For myself, however, letter writing is a favorite evening practice. Otherwise, think you, would I be engaged in writing this series of letters to you? FATHER SPERINDE.

III

SERIOUS STUDY.

My dear Prudenzia:

I have been very busy these past few days preparing a paper for our ecclesiastical Conference which is to take place in the assembly-rooms of the Cathedral next Tuesday afternoon. A clerical Conference, as I think I have already told you, is a meeting of all the Priests of the diocese, presided over by the Bishop or his Vicar-General, and held semi-annually or oftener for the purpose of considering questions bearing on the Priest's character and work or the Church's history and doctrine. There is usually a principal topic touching on some current Church activity or pronouncement, and two or three subsidiary ones, dealing with the routine matters of priestly learning. The former has to be worked up and presented in writing by all Priests who have not yet attained their twenty-fifth year of ordination; the latter

have only to be grasped in such a way as to qualify one to talk intelligently upon them.

When the meeting is called, the first act, after a short prayer and spiritual lection, is the reading of one of the written papers. This is done, as a rule, by a Priest who has been designated beforehand by the Bishop, and has, therefore, had incentive to prepare with special exactitude. When the reading is finished, comments are made by the one who presides or by any Priest who feels so inclined. Then the subsidiary questions are taken up, now one Priest now another being called on for views and explanations. This is usually succeeded by such recommendations, spiritual or otherwise, as the presiding officer may deem advisable. Prayer follows; whereupon the meeting resolves itself into a number of little groups, the while a hum and hubbub arise, as friends who have not met perhaps since the last Conference greet one another and discuss affairs of common interest.

From this you will understand that a Conference has for aim to keep Priests abreast of the most recent development of ecclesiastical thought, as well as to ensure their familiarity with the abiding matters of perennial priestly

learning. For Holy Mother Church knows that, just as an army will meet with disaster unless it be controlled and directed by officers acquainted with all that is newest and best in the ways of generalship, so her children will suffer defeat at the hands of evil influences that surround them unless they are presided over by a learned and well-informed clergy. Therefore she is not willing that her Priests should feel that once they are ordained they may rest secure in the course of study, long and exacting though it has been, that they made in college and seminary. Neither is she content to feel that because her Priests are by vocation and training naturally inclined to study, they will therefore, of their own volition, apply themselves to useful and pertinent reading. Nor, finally, is she satisfied with simply urging them to study and providing them with books and periodicals for the purpose. She knows that notwithstanding all these reassurances there would be some who, yielding to so-called active phases of priestly work, would fail to find of their own ordering as many peaceful hours for studious pursuits as she deems desirable. So she has recourse to ecclesiastical Conferences.

And the ecclesiastical Conference is not her only scheme. For instance, there is the one according to which Priests are obliged, for the first five years after ordination, to undergo each year a written examination in the subjects of their seminary course—the matter being so arranged as to bring about, at the end of the period, a complete review of theology, holy scripture, ecclesiastical history, liturgy, etc. The young Priests thus "corralled" feel, as you may well imagine, a certain amount of irksomeness at their position of extended pupilage, and they come in, at times, for a certain amount of good-natured badinage at the hands of slightly-advanced confrères. For instance, Father John, who last year finished his fifth year and is now free, calls on Father James. He finds him "plugging" at ecclesiastical history for an examination that is to come off the following week. With a lordly wave of the hand, and an exaggerated patronizing air, he says, "Oh, Father James! Pardon me! I would not disturb you for the world. Go right on with your work. You *young* men need all the time you can get to fit yourselves for association with us of the senior clergy." Of course Father James de-

clares, with a protesting grunt, that he has done all he intends to do that morning, and proceeds to the entertaining of his friend, who has had no notion of leaving anyway. But later on, when his friend is gone, he opens his book again; for he does not want to be caught unprepared. Those examinations are not "hit or miss" affairs. The men who have them in charge, known as Examiners of the Clergy, take them seriously enough, as I have had opportunity to observe in the course of a residence of seven years with one of them. Besides, the marks accorded are sent to the Bishop; and no Priest, old or young, wants his ecclesiastical superior to have a slight opinion of his priestly attainments.

And that brings to mind another plan of Holy Church for keeping her Priests at serious study. You know there are in every diocese certain parishes called Permanent Rectories. They are always the best equipped and the most completely organized—consequently the most desired. Well, the pastorate to such a parish is not given "regardless," but only to a Priest who has shown himself "fit." And the fitness is determined partly from a consideration of the candidate's complete

record of priestly ability—mental, spiritual, and executive—and partly, in case of Priests not yet twenty-five years ordained, from the results of an examination, written and oral, in all the subjects of ecclesiastical ministration. Now, you can appreciate that Priests with ambition for advancement (and it is a laudable, if not a universal, ambition) are not likely to neglect their books. Do you ask why such examinations cease after the twenty-fifth year? I cannot tell, unless it be that experience has shown that a Priest who in twenty-five years has not demonstrated his ability is hopeless.

But, my dear Prudenzia, though it was my purpose in starting out to furnish you with some idea of the above phase of a Priest's activity, it was not my only purpose. I wished also to tell you that I have been informed by the Bishop that my paper is to be the one read at the Conference next Tuesday, and to ask your prayers. No, I am not desirous of impressing the Bishop with a view to obtaining sudden promotion (pastoral promotions do not take place in that way); neither am I anxious to make a scholarly "hit" with my fellow Priests. (A Priest who desires to make a scholarly "hit" with his fellows is entertaining

the most vain and futile of all human ambitions.) I simply feel that I owe it to myself to do my best; and for that, what is so helpful as prayers? So, please, just a short prayer for the intention of

FATHER SPERINDE.

IV

INCIDENTAL ACTIVITIES

My dear Prudenzia:

Here I am in my room, having just come from a pleasant half-hour in the office with a young man to whom I am teaching English. He is a French-Canadian, about thirty years old, strong and vigorous, whose business it is to tend a furnace and take care of a small estate. Of school training he has none. He talks a "Marchez donc sur le *side-walk*" kind of French; and his English is of the "limping-pigeon" order. But ambition to read! I never saw anything like it. He never goes anywhere without his lesson-book; and his little wife (who is also without school training) said to me recently, "I can do noding wid heem, Fader, since he begin to learn to read; he stay up studyin' his hol' book mos' half de night." It is this devouring ambition, coupled with a fair ability to profit by the help that is given him, and a personality which, if not altogether

charming, is, to say the least, extremely attractive, that keeps me interested in him. I have had him now for half an hour almost every day for the last four months, usually at about 5:30 in the afternoon. Result? He is going into the Third Reader, and is doing so well that I am confident he will soon be able to read fluently.

As you read this you may be led to imagine that the character of my work is exceptional in a Priest's life. But it is not. Indeed, a Priest's day is given up to a great many works which, on their face, do not, as a good woman of my acquaintance once remarked, "belong to a Priest's job." Now it will be a young woman of the high school who will come for direction in the matter of an essay or debate. And the Priest will advise a topic, and outline a course of reading, and suggest treatment, and possibly, if the matter be one bearing on Church history or doctrine, give material assistance. Or again, it will be an "old-fashioned mother," who has a boy far away, it may be in the army or navy. And she has a letter to be read and one to be written weekly; and sure, "who like the Priest can do that same." Or it will be many another task

whose place in the Priest's day very few suspect.

For instance, I know a Priest who gave fifteen minutes practically every day for a year to a boy of his parish who stuttered. He was a bright boy, and the defect looked like a serious handicap. So the Priest familiarized himself with the approved methods of treating stammerers, and worked with the boy—correcting his breathing, having him read aloud, and so forth—with the result that in the end the defect was so thoroughly overcome as to enable the lad to pass a successful examination for West Point. Again, I know a Priest, a musician, who, discovering a boy with a "voice," instructed him with such thoroughness as to qualify him for a prominent musical career.

I dare say, however, that the commonest of all works of this nature is the teaching of boys who give signs of a religious vocation. Priests are ever on the lookout for such, especially among the boys who serve at the altar; and when they find one, there is nothing that they are not willing to do for him. Most often, however, the assistance takes the form of lessons in Greek and Latin. And there is many

a Priest, aye, and Bishop, too, who can look back to the days when, with mingled feelings of dread and pleasure, he sat in the parish rectory while Father So and So, now long dead, with a patience that was not appreciated until years afterwards, opened to him the mysteries of Latin prose or the Greek verb.

Now, I have said, a while back, that a certain good woman referred to this kind of activity as not belonging to "a Priest's job." The Priest, however, does not refer to it as such, nor think of it as such. Whatever he can do that is helpful, or sustaining, or uplifting, or make for improvement or happiness of man or woman, old or young, is regarded by him as part of his work. These things may take time, it is true, time which he might wish to employ otherwise; still he is glad to perform them—not because of any evidence of appreciation that comes to him (for it is a matter of remark that works of this kind bring as a rule but little evidences of appreciation), but from the consciousness that, like His Master, he is "doing good."

And this recalls a remark once made by a Priest friend of mine. This man is possessed of rare intellectual and literary gifts, of which

he had given unmistakable evidences in the early days of his priesthood. But at the time in question he was allowing himself to be almost entirely taken up with works of the character of which I have been telling you. One day I spoke to him about it. I asked him why he did not free himself from the "little things" which were monopolizing his time and devote himself to some larger work for which he was so eminently qualified and for which his friends were waiting. He gave no sign of annoyance at my petty view, but quietly said, "These little things which you speak of come up as a part of my daily work; while I am doing them God will not expect greater things of me." As he spoke there flashed across my mind that passage of Scripture which says, "He that is faithful in little things will be faithful also in greater." And, as a matter of fact, that man has since become an Archbishop.

FATHER SPERINDE.

V

WRITING FOR PUBLICATION

My dear Prudenzia:

I do not wonder at your question. More than you have been puzzled that the clergy, in view of their admirable educational equipment and their opportunities for studious pursuits, should not more generally write for publication. But mark you, the anomaly, if anomaly it may be called, lies not in any lack of native inclination. Indeed the itch to write is quite prevalent, especially among the younger members of the clergy. I would even venture to say that comparatively few men enter the priesthood without entertaining the notion, at least vaguely, that some day or other they will—no, not startle the world—but at least modestly and unostentatiously take their place among the small but valiant number of writers who are waging earnest and successful warfare in the cause of Holy Mother Church. Some go so far as to decide upon a useful

and congenial topic, and sketch plans, and write pages and pages of manuscript, which, in bursts of confidence, and with many apologies, they ruefully show to this or that more intimate friend. But only rarely do these abortive efforts find their way to the printer's type box, because their modest authors take good care to see that they are seasonably and effectively destroyed. No; the reason for the Priest's failure to write is not due to any lack of natural inclination, but rather to a peculiar mental attitude that is developed in him as a consequence of the exceptional conditions of his calling. I will explain.

A Priest is not long ordained before he comes to feel that though indeed he may be as fully qualified to write as most of the authors who are keeping the printing presses busy, he has really no urgent reason to write. True, were he a genius, he would not wait for an urgent reason. (The mute, inglorious Miltons were all buried in the churchyard where Grey wrote his Elegy.) But he is not a genius, only a man of talent (though it may be, of real talent); and talent ordinarily waits on some external stimulus, which, in his case, is deemed to be lacking; for his position is es-

tablished, his living is secure, and there is no one to encourage him, but rather those who would discourage him in his efforts. Besides, on looking over the field, he decides that the conditions demanding the service of the pen are already being adequately met by men fully capable of the task, or by agencies specially erected by ecclesiastical authority for the purpose. And so he settles down to the fulfillment of the apostolic mandate of preaching, and rests content.

Then, to this feeling of a lack of urgent necessity there are to be added certain other considerations which serve to confirm him in his course. There is, for instance, the effect upon him of what may be called the spirit of ecclesiastical coordination. The Church is an organism, and the Priest is but a very subordinate member thereof. As a consequence, he experiences a feeling of genuine timidity when there is question of taking a protagonistic part in any movement—above all a movement which calls for the printed word. He is inclined rather to hold back and wait for some one else, whom he regards as more properly qualified than he, to take the initiative. Of course, if his superior directs him to write, he

will, out of obedience, comply, and do the best he can; otherwise he will keep his pen out of the ink-well.

Then again, there is the serious consideration that as a Priest he may not, like other men, be responsible only to himself. Whether he will or no, there is attached to his simplest word a weight and importance out of all proportion to its literal significance, and a consequence which, were he not a Priest, would never ensue. And when, with this fact in mind, he reflects, on the one hand, how delicate are the subjects to be treated—how difficult of exact expression, how susceptible of misconstruction and false interpretation, how open to carping criticism of pseudo-friend and declared foe; and, on the other hand, how this Priest or that, by giving printed expression to his thoughts, has found himself cast out of the fair path of priestly peace and serenity to wander in the fields of prickly strife and trouble, he hesitates, nay, he fears—

> "And enterprises of great pith and moment
> With this regard their currents turn awry,
> And lose the name of action. . . . . ."

Finally, there are the normal impedimenta of a Priest's parochial labors. He is plunged

in duties which tend to sap and mine all literary proclivities—a school or church or house to be built; plans to be put through for meeting the financial burdens of the ecclesiastical establishment; young men's clubs and social welfare agencies to be supervised; and a thousand and one other matters that come up in a Priest's routine for settlement. As a consequence, he finds it difficult to attune himself to the spirit required for literary thought and expression, and gradually allows his scholarly tendencies to find their satisfaction in a course of reading, more or less systematic, and in amicable discussion with his confrères of such topics as are brought up in the various magazines of ecclesiastical thought.

Now I realize, Prudenzia, that these statements may be far from providing a convincing argument for Priests not publishing more than they do. But they were not penned for that purpose. They were given simply to expose to you the attitude, praiseworthy or otherwise, that Priests generally assume in this matter of writing for the press.

FATHER SPERINDE.

IV

LAY ORGANIZATIONS

My dear Prudenzia:

This morning I received a letter from the Bishop appointing me chaplain to the local council of the K. of C. Of course, I shall be happy to serve; still I cannot say that I am keen for the position. I realize that this may sound somewhat contradictory; and yet it is true. For a Priest's association with lay organizations, while affording him opportunities for many pleasurable satisfactions, is, at the same time, among the most trying of all the ways wherein he and the laity are brought together.

The gladdening features are varied. There is, for instance, the pleasure that comes from meeting, on common ground, the best types of Catholic manhood and womanhood in the locality; for there are very few of our representative Catholics who are not identified in some way or other with this or that lay or-

ganization. Then there is the happiness to be derived from participating in lay movements which are successful to a most wonderful degree in making better known the ineffable truths of Christ and His Church. For this is an age, par excellence, of the fruitful lay apostolate; of this no clearer proof could be desired than the records of the K. of C.; and the K. of C., though doubtless the most prominent, is by no means the only organization engaged in this glorious work: their name is legion, male and female, from one end of the country to the other. But though the movements are distinctively lay in their character, the Priest is by no means any idle spectator. His figure may not be discernible in the foreground, but he is there nevertheless, suggesting, encouraging, counselling, directing. The laity naturally look to the Priest in such matters, and no important step is taken until his stand is known. His cooperation gives strength, resolution, and a sense of security to their efforts. His words and acts of friendly encouragement and endorsement are received with a gratitude that is positively moving in its warmth and whole-heartedness. Hence, his heart thrills with joy when he contemplates

the results that his organization, with his co-operation, has accomplished. Finally, there is the satisfaction which comes from the conviction that by his identification with lay organizations he is doing what in him lies to prevent the Church in this country from falling into the position which it is said to occupy in France, where, on account of the aloofness of the clergy, the great bulk of the population has been lost to ecclesiastical influence.

But, Prudenzia, while all this is undeniable, it still remains true that association with lay organizations is trying for a Priest. In the first place, there are the embarrassments which arise from the fact that these organizations, though indeed Catholic and calculated to promote Catholic causes, are, in their structure and workings, predominatingly worldly. That is, while they conform, in a general way, to the religious ideal, they are, in their details, maintained and carried on, as indeed they must be, with a view to meeting the social and worldly requirements of their members. Now it is not easy for a Priest to feel completely at home in an atmosphere of this kind. True, Priests here and there may; but the majority do not. The Priest's training is responsible.

It has kept him away so long from worldly interests and preoccupations that he senses a feeling of awkwardness and embarrassment when he is placed where he has to take an active interest in them. Again, there are the incidents which occasionally arise that place him in a somewhat compromising position. For instance, I know of a certain Priest who, having been invited on a Sunday in Lent to a dinner party arranged in his honor by the members of a Catholic organization, was asked, at the outset of the meal, if fish and meat might be eaten—oysters having been served. At the time the combination was forbidden; and the Priest, citing the law, added that though he was not in a position to enforce it, all Catholics worthy of the name willingly complied with it. Imagine his consternation when several of the party, all officers of the organization, nonchalantly proceeded to violate the regulation. Or, to take another instance. Imagine the emotions of a Priest identified with a Catholic organization when he reads in the morning paper that the members of his society, holding for one of their number who was about to enter the holy bonds of wedlock a so-called "shower," proceeded to

enliven the happy occasion by a "mock marriage." True, instances of this character may not be frequent; but they have occurred, and their very possibility is enough to dull the edge of the Priest's zest in lay organization work. Then, again, there is the fact that a Priest's appearance at a society meeting is almost certain to entail a speech. Unquestionably the invitation is given as a mark of deference to his position. This he understands clearly, and he is deeply appreciative of the honor. Yet ordinarily he is embarrassed by it; for, on the one hand, he does not like to refuse, and, on the other, he does not care to speak unless he feels that he has something worth while to say. I remember of having myself done my best on a certain occasion of this kind, only to be naïvely told by the president, later on, that my talk had been a distinct disappointment, inasmuch as something entirely different had been expected. Finally (not to drag out this letter to too great a length), there is the consideration that society meetings usually last until a late hour—late, at least, for the Priest. And he dislikes not only to break in upon the progress of the meeting by leaving before it is over, but still more to feel the inquiring glances as

he takes his place with the late night stragglers on the last car home.

So, Prudenzia, you can see that though indeed participation in society doings possesses elements that make for the Priest's enjoyment and satisfaction, it entails also conditions (and I have by no means mentioned all of them) that make for his embarrassment. However, I will declare to you that in my present appointment I am going to try seriously to overcome the little incidental obstacles and prove myself to be a genuinely useful member of the organization.

FATHER SPERINDE.

VII

THE NON-CATHOLIC CLERGY

My dear Prudenzia:

No doubt the experiences of Priests everywhere are very much the same; nevertheless I question if anywhere outside of a country parish would occur the incident which happened to me this morning. I was at breakfast when the telephone rang. I answered and the Reverend Mr. Eddyson, Pastor of one of the "Meeting Houses" at the other end of the town, opened a conversation. Before giving you the gist of what he said, however, I should first tell you that I had already met Mr. Eddyson several times, and although our relations had been hardly more than casual, there had been about them that which had given to each a feeling of respect and admiration for the other. I dare say it was this feeling which served as the basis of his rather strange proposal.

He came to the point immediately. It was, that inasmuch as the war had aroused in the town's-people (who as a whole are but little given to church attendance) a spirit favorable to religion, the time seemed to him providentially opportune for all the clergy of the place to come together in weekly meetings, at my house or at some other place to be decided on later, for the purpose of formulating plans for keeping the newly-awakened spirit alive and, in so far as possible, strengthening and developing it. I told him that it took me about all my time to keep alive the religious spirit in my own flock; and that, besides, although his project looked attractive, it involved details which made its feasibility very doubtful. On his inquiry as to what those details were, I explained how fundamentally different were my religious principles from those of the non-Catholic clergymen, and how far apart from theirs were the practices which I sought to develop as expressions of religious life. He felt that these difficulties were not so formidable as I imagined, and suggested that the project be given a trial. I said, "Well, now, let us see. You know the temper of the other non-Catholic clergymen better than I. Suppose that we

were at a meeting, and I had a suggestion to offer, do you think that it would meet with a favorable reception from, let us say, the Rev. Mr. Dowdy?" (I had met Mr. Dowdy and knew him to entertain bitter feelings for Catholicism.) "I am very sure that it would not," he replied; "and as for the Rev. Mr. Harroway," he continued, "he regards a Catholic Priest as the very next to the devil." (Those were his very words.) "There you are," I said; "now, do you really believe that any practical results could come from a meeting wherein one of the members regarded another as next to his satanic majesty?" "I suppose not," he faltered. And the conversation drifted to our mutual expressions of good-will and hopes that our former friendliness might not be impaired by our inability to pool our influences for the advancement of religious unity.

Now, Prudenzia, while this conversation does not by any means illustrate a typical instance of the relations that arise between Priest and Minister, it at least serves to show that relations of some sort do exist, and that they are likely at times to take on a rather striking character. True, in cities they are not usually very frequent. Still, they exist to some ex-

tent even there; and there is scarcely a city Pastor who has not occasion, now or then, to come into dealings with his non-Catholic brethren of the cloth. But in the country, where everybody knows everybody, and where, no matter how small the village, there are inevitably at least three Ministers—though why it should be so, when their dogmatic differences are so slight and when any one of their churches could easily hold the congregations that go to all, is more than a Priest can understand—they are quite frequent. Indeed, scarcely a week passes but what Priests and Ministers meet, either in the post-office, or in one of the stores, or along one of the village streets. And the Priest is necessarily forced to adopt an attitude. Certainly, he can, if he wishes, ignore his non-Catholic brothers altogether. But he knows that to do that would be to set vibrating all the inharmonious chords of his nature and put him out of tune not only with himself but with all those with whom he came in contact, thereby injuring the very cause for which he stands. Or, he can, if he wishes, fraternize with them on a plane of open and intimate brotherhood. But here again he knows that injury would result; inasmuch as

the weaker members of his congregation, inferring that the difference between the Catholic and non-Catholic faiths was only a matter of externals and form, might be led to contract mixed marriages whose offspring would inevitably be made up of lapsed or indifferent Catholics. He decides, therefore, to avoid both of these extremes and to follow a middle way of gracious courtesy and genial civility; wherein, while standing uncompromisingly for the principles of which he is the recognized exponent, he accords to others the right to follow their own conscience, no matter how feeble may be the light that guides. And in coming to this decision he is influenced not only by the conviction that difference in religion ought not to preclude the exchange of the ordinary courtesies of civil life, but still more by the fact that many Protestants, seeing how the individualism of their denominationalism is threatening more and more the dissolution of their whole religious fabric, are beginning to look with an ever-increasing respect, if not of yearning, towards that Church whose glorious front stretches across an unbroken line of more than two thousand years.

Do my words lead you to think, Prudenzia,

that Priests imagine that the conversion of the non-Catholic world is close at hand? Not at all; they are simply mindful of what Saint Francis of Sales says somewhere about a drop of honey being able to catch more flies than a barrel of vinegar.

FATHER SPERINDE.

VIII

PUBLIC MOVEMENTS

My dear Prudenzia:

I was rather amused at what you said in your recent letter about my chairmanship of the local committee for procuring a suitable memorial to the men of our town who served in the recent war. No doubt, indeed, the position is an honor. And no doubt, too, as you say, such honors fit no one more becomingly than Priests. Yet Priests, as a class, set but little store by them. Indeed, they are anxious, not only to avoid prominence but even to refrain from participating at all (save in national or moral crises) in so-called public movements. I do not mean by this that they are not on the alert and interested—they are; nor that they are willing to stand idly by when public action threatens injury to Catholic interests. Only recently, a Priest friend of mine, by raising his voice at a town meeting, where a movement was on foot to endow beds in a

secular hospital, succeeded in having provisions made whereby the Catholic sick should be sent to institutions under Catholic auspices. And this is but a slight instance of what is going on at all times everywhere. What I mean is, that when committees are forming for the promotion of public causes, Priests, as a rule, prefer not to be placed on them, and if, without having been consulted, they receive appointment, they either decline to serve or become conspicuous by their absence from meetings. I realize that this, in the eyes of many, is tantamount to an indictment of the clergy. But while Priests will admit that at times their course places them in an unfavorable if not obnoxious light, they still persist in it. Some of the reasons which influence them may not easily be appreciated by you, inasmuch as they have their roots in a traditional conservatism which is the product of priestly training and which induces Priests to turn instinctively from mixing up in matters which are not intimately related to the strictly sacerdotal character of their calling. But there are others which are less esoteric. I shall mention one or two.

At the outset, it is to be observed that pub-

lic movements of the character of which I speak rarely, if ever, succeed in arriving at results which please everybody interested. Nay, not infrequently they end by arousing a spirit of antagonism against their authors. Now a Priest does not care, for the mere sake of public polity, to run the risk of antagonizing anybody—not because of any untoward results to himself personally, but because of the possible unfortunate effects on the cause for which he labors. For he has often seen that, where Priests are concerned, people are prone to shift from the material to the spiritual, and that feelings aroused in matters of merely transitory significance often react injuriously on matters of vital and eternal import. So he recalls St. Paul's words, "All things are lawful to me, but all things are not expedient," and he gladly allows the glory of public movements to go to those whose life work is not affected by them, no matter what their outcome may be.

Again, public movements of this kind are rarely if ever entirely free from some kind of obnoxious admixture: certain favors are to be secured; or certain business interests have to be considered; or the expectations of a certain constituency must be satisfied; and there is

miserable messing, and secret scheming, and the playing of petty politics; and the Priest, almost before he is aware, is painfully involved. Or, he says something that is misinterpreted or given an unfavorable twist—and he becomes the object of suspicion, and his name is bandied about, and his peace of mind is disturbed, and his influence with his people is weakened. These details, indeed, may be somewhat exceptional, or even exaggerated; but things like them have often happened; and they are always at least possible; and even the possibility has a restraining influence on a Priest.

Then there is the fact that, somehow or other, public movements of this kind rarely terminate without a function in which some form of religious exercise is injected. The Reverend Mr. So-and-So will be invited to give the invocation while the Catholic Priest will be asked to pronounce the benediction. (Such is the usual formula.) Now, Priests find such religious exercises peculiarly distasteful. They regard them more in the light of harangues addressed to an audience than prayers offered to the Almighty. And they are scrupulously anxious to avoid identifica-

tion with any movement which is likely to lead to them.

Finally, there are the considerations which I suggested in my recent letter on "The Priest Writing for Publication." For instance, what was there characterized as "the spirit of ecclesiastical coordination" has application in the present connection, inasmuch as it deters a Priest from taking part in a public movement unless he can feel quite certain beforehand that his cooperation has the endorsement of his superior. And it is not always easy or congenial to get at the attitude of one's superiors in matters of this kind—at least not so easy or congenial as to keep apart from the movements altogether.

Now, possibly, Prudenzia, you may be one of those who look upon such a course as lacking in what has been termed "ecclesiastical militancy." But Priests are very well aware that they cannot please everybody. And they content themselves with striving to promote, as successfully as their abilities will allow, the work for which, in the whole-hearted generosity of their early days, they freely and gladly dedicated their lives—namely, the salvation of souls. And they feel convinced that when, in

the end, the time comes for them to receive the reward of their labors, they will find that the efforts which netted them richest returns were not those which were exerted amid the noise and notoriety of public movements, but those which were wrought in the quiet obscurity of the confessional or at the lowly bedside of the poor.

FATHER SPERINDE.

IX

SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

My dear Prudenzia:

You will no doubt remember that it was a remark of yours about Father Blank's failure to attend a reception that led to the writing of these letters. Well, that remark came back to me with emphasis last night, because I attended a reception and I—but wait, I had better go back and tell the story from the beginning.

You know that we, no less than you, have recently elected as Mayor "one of our own"—a young man of whom we are all very proud. The event created no small stir in Catholic circles, and our different social organizations vied with one another in their efforts to show him honor. Of the various functions thus projected, one arranged by the Daughters of Blanche of Castile, a club made up of our more prominent Catholic young women, came to occupy a foremost place. Preparations for

it were made on rather an elaborate scale, and invitations were sent to all the so-called representative Catholics, among whom, of course, were the clergy. The affair took place last night, and I went.

It is easy for you to imagine me as I journey on my way, wearing my Prince Albert coat, which had been freshly pressed (the clergy of the present day are not given to the regular use of Prince Alberts), a brand-new pair of gloves (I had been warned that Suede was the proper form), and my tall hat—resurrected by the housekeeper from some secret place in which it had been put after the last Holy Name parade. As I walked along the street, from the car, I wore an air of nonchalance which I really did not feel, because the unaccustomedness of my sartorial perfection produced in me an awkward sensation, as of one who had a physical peculiarity that drew to him the curious glances of casual passers-by. However, I encouraged myself with the thought that I would soon have clerical companions in my distress, and proceeded bravely on my way.

Arriving at the hall, the strains of a stringed orchestra, mingling with the sound of chatter

and laughter that rose and fell in waves from the more than two hundred guests already gathered, put me, for the moment at least, in a pleasantly exhilarating frame of mind. Fair young women, dressed in the latest fashion, floated before my blurred vision (the night was cold, and my glasses were all asteam from the sudden heat of the room); while here and there, like sombre effigies in a field of golden grain, loomed the representatives of the "male portion of the aggregation." But, though I looked carefully in every direction (and I cleared my glasses for the purpose), nary Roman collar could I spy, save for that of the Moderator, who, with the guest of the evening, stood in a far-off corner, chatting casually, as if waiting for the ceremonies to begin. Like a flash, the realization rushed in upon me—I was alone. With a heavy thud, my heart dropped down into my brightly-shined shoes, and I became suddenly seized with a feeling as of a man who had been thrown overboard in a waste of waters and left to his fate. A number of young people whom I knew came over to me, and sought to engage me in kindly conversation. But my mind was preoccupied; so I just stood there looking sheepishly about, and wish-

ing that I was in any other place in all the world. And as soon as the opportunity presented itself, without even waiting to meet the guest of the evening, I furtively made my way to the clothes-room, ruefully donned my silk hat once more, and started for home.

"But," I hear you say quickly, "I have attended receptions very much like the one you describe, and I have seen quite a number of Priests present." Yes, I know; quite a number considered by themselves, but few compared with the whole number invited. And the majority of those few, had you but noted the fact, spent the greater portion of the evening in the smoking-room; and could you but have read their minds, they were wishing themselves home, where unquestionably they would have been, had they not had some private reason that made them feel that it was their duty to be present. (I had a private reason last night—it was my friendship for the Moderator.)

The truth is, Prudenzia, that Priests, with few exceptions, are decidedly averse to attending social lay functions, even those which are most formal and dignified. That does not imply that they are opposed to them. They

recognize very well that such functions are a necessary feature of the life of people of the world. But, although Priests are in the world, they are not of it—at least, they desire not to be. As a consequence, the whole atmosphere of such affairs, saturated as it inevitably is with worldliness, is absolutely uncongenial. The ordinary Priest cannot breathe comfortably in it. He is like one out of his element.

The reasons for this will, I dare say, be readily understood by you. There are, for instance, the gowns of the women. The Priest has, very probably, at some time or other, made scathing reference to such gowns from the pulpit. And now he hardly knows where to look. His training on the custody of the eyes handicaps him. He is self-conscious, and awkward, and ill at ease. Then there is the chit-chat, idle, gossipy, frivolous, which forms the staple of conversation at such affairs. It befuddles him. Were he to meet with any one of the individuals present, at any other time, and in any other place, he could no doubt hold his own. But now he feels helpless. He is at a loss what to say. And what he does say, as he thinks of it afterwards, seems so idiotic and inane; though it did not strike him so at the time. And

he does think of it afterwards; it keeps coming back to him; he can't help it; and he becomes annoyed with himself, and his aversion to the source of his annoyance grows.

Then, besides these reasons, springing out of the affairs themselves, there are others which are, as it were, co-relative to them. For instance, there is the tendency on the part of the clergy generally to regard one of their fellows who is often seen at such functions as being anxious for social prominence—a "climber." And that is not a pleasant reputation for a Priest to gain. Then, there is the attitude of the laity themselves. Our good people are very exacting. No matter how desirous they may be of having their Priest one with themselves, they are decidedly averse to seeing in him any special evidences of worldly tendencies. And to some lay persons the most indifferent signs are evidence of such tendency. In speaking of such affairs afterwards, a person of this type is likely to say (something like it has often been said): "Oh! I saw Father So and So at the reception last night; and do you know, he seemed to be having a lovely time"—with an inflection which gives a world of meaning which the words themselves would not convey.

When a Priest hears that said about a confrère he is very apt mentally to congratulate himself on having remained at home.

And now, Prudenzia, add to all this the fuss and flurry normally attendant on doing something which is out of the ordinary course of one's daily manner of living, and you will have, I think, some of the reasons which brought about Father Blank's absence from your recent reception.

FATHER SPERINDE.

X

VISITING THE LAITY

My dear Prudenzia:

I cannot begin to tell you how much I enjoyed my visit to your home last evening. I was delighted, and so, too, was Father Blank, who accompanied me. But if you were to ask me just what it was that made our pleasure so keen, I should have difficulty in telling you. It was not alone the rubber of whist, although that was delightful; nor the music, which was excellent; nor, yet, the chatting that went on amid such merriment and good nature. Neither was it all of these things together, but rather something that surrounded them, as a kind of atmosphere; or better, something that lived in them, as the soul in the body. And now, after all this preliminary analysis, I think that I can tell you just what it was; it was the spirit of your ideal home reaching out to the home spirit within our hearts, and satisfying it. For the Priest, like all other human

beings, has within him capacity for those enjoyments which are peculiar to the family circle; and not being able, in the routine of rectory life, to have it satisfied, he finds keenest pleasure when, even for a moment, it receives partial fulfillment in a home like yours.

I do not think that people generally recognize this. For many, indeed, the Priest is little more than a functionary, saying Mass, hearing confessions, preaching, and now and then, as the occasion demands, bringing solace, spiritual or material. And if there be those among them who do advert to him as a "human," their advertence is very likely to take the form of a comment on how well off he is, "with his fine house and soft, easy living." "For a dandy job," said one of these, "give me the Bishop's."

For your people, however, as well as for a great many others like you, the case is different. You realize, no less than others, that the Priest is a man apart, consecrated and annealed to break unto men the Bread of Life; but you also realize that though he may have a cozy room, and congenial companions, and well-filled book-shelves, and a diverting hobby, and many interesting duties (all of which, save the last, he is just as likely not to have), he is

still often lonely, especially as he gets older and the friends and intimates who used to warm his heart have begun to go to those distant realms towards which his own thoughts are now so frequently turning. And so, when he comes to you, though you do not fail to manifest towards him the reverence and respect which are due to his sacred character, you nevertheless surround him with an atmosphere that permits him to breathe in, for the moment at least, something of the whole-souled satisfaction that his "homely" nature craves.

But, you may ask, if such be the case, how is it that you do not visit us more frequently, as we have often asked you to do? Or how is it that Priests generally are so sparing in their visits to the laity? Those, Prudenzia, are very natural questions, and I shall try to answer them. But I shall direct myself only to the latter, for in answering that I shall really be answering the former also.

In the first place, then, Priests generally are sparing in their visits to the laity because they realize that, no matter how thoroughly they may be consecrated to the spiritual ideals of their calling, their hearts are never so completely "dehumanized" as to be beyond the

possibility of getting inordinately attached to merely human pleasures, even though those pleasures may be in themselves innocent and legitimate. And once their hearts do become so attached, they know that "the bloom goes off the peach" of their priestly single-heartedness, and the words which they uttered on entering into the clerical state, "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup," have no longer the old ring of sincerity and truth. This conviction and knowledge have been borne in upon them, not only by warnings expressed again and again in ascetic writings, but still more by observance of cases working themselves out among Priests of their acquaintance, as well as a consciousness of the same tendency manifesting itself within their own hearts.

Again, Priests realize that if the practice of visiting be indulged in frequently it is likely to grow and grow until it monopolizes more time than can be spared. There are so many people, like yourselves, who are anxious to be good and kind to the Priest, whose hearts are so ready to go out to him in his loneliness, and who are so pleased and even honored to have him as guest in their homes, that they are con-

stantly extending to him invitations, which, were he to accept but half of them, would render impossible the fulfillment of his priestly duties. For a Priest's duties are not made up of a number of definite things which have to be done and, once done, he is free. For him to look upon them in that light would be to constitute him a "hireling." As a matter of fact, the getting of these things done, for the real Priest, is but, as it were, "the shell of the nut." His great concern is not with getting things done, but with getting them done as a Priest should get them done. And that means hours and hours aside from those taken up with the actual saying of Mass, hearing of confessions, going on sick-calls and the like—hours in his room, all alone, in study, in reading, in reflection, in prayer. In his eyes these last are no less real duties than the first, and he is anxious that nothing should be allowed to interfere with them, as no doubt the visiting habit would.

Then, finally, there is the consideration of the unwholesome effect that frequent visiting might have on others. All excellent Catholic homes are not equally attractive; and in frequently visiting where there is greater appeal,

there lies a danger that homes not so highly favored might remark; and remarking, make comment; and making comment, start a rumor; and starting a rumor, create gossip; and creating gossip, reflect on (to express it in its mildest terms) one's priestly zeal and disinterestedness. And if there is any one thing more than another that a Priest dreads, it is any reflection, no matter how slight, upon his priestly character — not merely for the sting that it gives himself, but more for the disastrous effect that it has upon his ministry. For just as breath will dull the brightness of refined gold, so gossip about a Priest's priestliness will rob his efforts of their chiefest lustre and glory.

So, my dear Prudenzia, for all these reasons, as well as for others that might be cited, Priests generally (for, of course, there are exceptions) hold themselves in check in this matter of social calling. Some go to the extent of never making a social call at all. Others, while not adopting such heroic measures (though, indeed, they may do so when it is a question of their own parishes), exercise a prudent restraint and visit only at irregular intervals. You know in which of these classes I belong;

consequently you may again expect to see me, when occasion offers, a happy member of your charming family circle.

FATHER SPERINDE.

XI

THE THEATRE

My dear Prudenzia:

I can thoroughly appreciate that you should be surprised to see Father Blank at the theatre the other evening, and that, again, in view of his presence and the character of the play (for nothing could be more decorous than Sothern and Marlowe's "Hamlet") you should be no less surprised that more Priests were not present. The explanation lies in the attitude of Priests towards theatre-going. In the case of concerts, there can be no question. All Priests feel perfectly free to go to hear McCormack, or Schumann-Heink, or the Boston Symphony; and their going or not depends almost exclusively on whether or not they enjoy music and can spare the time. But theatrical productions are different.

Of course, Priests do not feel that there is anything radically wrong in a theatrical production, in itself. Indeed, they know that if

the Church was not the originator of the idea, she was at least one of the influences which contributed most to its development—as is clear from even a slight examination of the part played by her in promoting Morality and Miracle Plays, which were the great theatrical productions of the Middle Ages. Hence, unless there were an explicit ecclesiastical prohibition, Priests would see nothing essentially wrong in going to a good play. As a matter of fact, there are Priests who go—some few frequently, others only rarely and under special circumstances: but as a class they go not at all; and there are many reasons why.

In the first place, there is what might be called the historical reason, or at least a reason that has its roots in history. The theatre, long ago, departed from the standards established by the Church, and in place of "Moralities" substituted what in a great measure might be justly called the "Immoralities"; and a bad reputation came to be attached to it. As a consequence, not only the clergy, but decent people generally, came to look upon play-going as a questionable diversion. It is true that recently strong efforts have been and are still being made to "purify the stage," as the say-

ing is; but they have had but little noticeable success. Hence, although our people may feel free to go themselves, they still think that the theatre is "no fit place for a Priest"; and they are a bit shocked when they see him there. And Priests, as a class, share this feeling; for no matter how successfully they may convince themselves that they are justified in going, they experience, all the while, a sense of being "out of their element"; and they much prefer that their parishioners would not see them. In view of such a mental attitude, you will not wonder that Priests, even though they might, perchance, desire to see a certain play, will choose to remain at home.

A second reason for their remaining away lies in the effect of their going on the play-going practice of others. To people generally, "a show is a show," and they will not stop to reflect on the special character of the play at which they have seen Father Blank. They will simply say, "I saw Father Blank at the show last night"; and on the strength of his presence at King Lear they will easily convince themselves that they are free to witness any of the many specimens of the modern producers' salacious repertory. And if perchance,

as is very likely, Father Blank feels called upon to make strictures from the pulpit regarding attendance at certain plays of unsavory odor, he is somewhat abashed to have it reach his ears that a certain thoughtless member of his congregation has said, "I don't see why Father Blank should be so hard; he goes to shows himself! I have seen him there."

A third reason, for like old sermons this letter will be made up of three points (in fact, it is getting to read like a sermon, isn't it?) arises from the absence in the Priest's life of various accidental incentives which, apart from the desire to witness a play for its own sake, contribute very materially to foster the habit of theatre-going. There is, for instance, the chit-chat about plays that goes on continually in friendly gatherings of the laity. "Have you seen Daddy Longlegs? No? Oh! You must see it. It is just lovely. I would not miss it for anything." Of course, the person addressed feels duty bound to go. Then there is the social factor: a party is arranged, and seats are procured, and there is chatter and gossip and companionship, and possibly, after the play, something to eat; and the affair takes on the aspect of a society happening, in which

attendance at the theatre is but a contributing incident. Finally, there is the part that the theatre plays in keeping people of the world abreast of the latest developments in speech and dress. For in such matters the theatre is a school; and unless one is willing to be regarded as a "back-number" or a prude, he feels that he simply must go. But none of these incentives find any place in the Priest's life. Hence, his natural desire, if he has one, gradually dies in much the same way as a fire dies when there is no fuel to keep it going.

And so, Prudenzia, I might go on; for there are many other reasons which I could give were I speaking to you directly. But these, I think, are sufficient. However, in concluding I would say, that in addition to all these motives the ordinary Priest is convinced in his heart that the regular sphere of his labors, the association with his fellow Priests and people, and the recreations to which, in the eyes of the world, he has unquestioned right, ought to be sufficient to provide him with all the diversion which his priestly spirit should crave; and if he should find that he was becoming possessed of an habitual yearning for such amusements as the theatre has to offer, he would begin to fear

that the salt was losing its savor, and decide that the time had come for him to take a fresh reckoning of his bearings.

FATHER SPERINDE.

XII

PRIESTS OF THE DIOCESE

My dear Prudenzia:

Since last writing to you I have been to see my friend Father Blank. I arrived just before dinner, and as I sat chatting with him and his assistants the door opened, and in walked Fathers Calmody and Dennison. And hardly had we finished the customary greetings when the bell rang, and we all went into the dining-room—a jolly, impromptu little party. "Jolly for you," I hear you say; "but how about the housekeeper?" Well, that is a consideration; and I cannot say just what attention is given to it. But I do know that whatever it may be, the practice of Priests dropping in unexpectedly at meal-times still continues uninterruptedly. I have often seen two or three come in even after soup was served, and with no more ado than a casual remark that their car had been stalled, take places which had been hurriedly set for them and chime in with the conversation

as if everything had happened according to form. To new housekeepers, no doubt, such occurrences are trying, and more than once I have seen terror and consternation reflected on their faces. However, the keeping of a Priest's house, even under the most perfect conditions, is no sinecure but, as one wag expressed it, "a job that merits for each year spent at it seven years' indulgence in purgatory." And the woman who is possessed of the qualities which enable her to stay (and if she is not possessed of them she will not stay long) possesses that one quality which will lead her to accept stoically the unexpected advent of guests for dinner. Nay more; when she comes to realize, as she soon does, that Priests call, not for food, but for "comradery," and that, though indeed many of them may like good things to eat, they are, as a class, the least "fussy" of men, taking pot-luck with a kindly grace and a keen appreciation that they are not slow to express, she finds joy in looking after them and is glad to see them arrive. However, it was not to discuss the complications of a Priest's household management that I narrated this incident, but simply to give you an inkling of how largely accepted the practice of priestly visiting must

be when such happenings can commonly occur. As a matter of fact, the practice is deep and widespread; and there are special reasons why it should be.

For instance, there is the manner in which the Priests go to confession. They are not tied down to a particular time or place, as is the rule generally with the laity, but go, weekly or bi-weekly, as the case may be, at any hour that is convenient, and to any Priest that may be decided upon—though usually an older man, or a member of a Religious Order, as being peculiarly fitted, is selected. True, visits of this kind can hardly be called social; for although the penitent may occasionally remain, after confession, for a chat or even dinner, usually, having attained his object, he is ready, at once, to be on his way. But, though not social, they are regular and frequent, and give rise, as you may imagine, to a great deal of coming and going.

Another reason for the exceptionally large amount of priestly visiting is intimate friendship. I venture to say that among no class of men are friendship ties so numerous or so enduring as among Priests; and this is easily understood. For where, after all, are condi-

tions for the establishment of friendship better to be found than in the priesthood—or where, better than there, can *iidem velle, iidem nolle*—the essential requisites of lasting friendship—be more truly realized? Many of these friendships have their roots in the seminary. There, at that precise period when, if ever, human nature is open, generous, and confiding, two young men, imbued with the same lofty ideals (and no ideals could be higher than those of the seminary), are drawn together by a similarity of taste and harmony of inclination. The rapprochement thus begun, very probably unconsciously on both sides, finds rich opportunities for development in the isolation which the seminary training exacts. On beautiful summer evenings, along tree-arched avenues—during long winter afternoons, in recreation halls and ambulating corridors—in the course of holiday excursions to town and country—confidences are exchanged, joys and sorrows shared, and dreams and ambitions talked over and encouraged. Thus the flower of friendship buds and blossoms. Later on, as the cares and responsibilities of the priesthood accumulate, the freshness and exuberance of those halcyon days will naturally pass away;

but strength and virility will come in to take their place; and the friendship will go on and on until it finds its apotheosis in eternity. Other friendships begin only later, in the days of priestly association. But although these may lack some of the idyllic sweetness that characterizes those of seminary formation, they are none the less abiding and sincere. Now, you can easily realize that in a diocese where there are many Priests there will naturally be many friendships of both of these kinds, consequently much visiting. For it is of the very nature of friendship to bring people together—to go back in spirit to the sweet days that are gone, to enter into each other's present set-backs and successes, to talk over plans and projects for the future.

A final source of the wide practice of priestly visiting lies in what I would designate as the spirit of kindly hospitality, genial fellowship, and clerical good-will. For Priests being engaged in a work of exceptional character, and living a life that is not merely unusual but, I would almost say, abnormal, constitute a class apart. Hence it happens that at a clerical Conference, or an annual Retreat, or through some accidental association, they

get to know one another. And once they become acquainted they feel free to visit, knowing that every Priest's house is open to a fellow Priest (for hospitality is the very soul of a pastor's household management), and that community of interests and identity of work will supply abundant material for conversation and entertainment. You should not infer from this, however, that such visits are taken up entirely with "shop talk" or serious conversation. No doubt such topics will arise, for Priests are forever consulting one another on this or that matter of technical character. But the dominant note, if such there be, is not seriousness, but what I would call boyishness. For every Priest, no matter how much of business shrewdness and mental adroitness his contact with the world may have given him, has within him the heart of a boy. To appreciate this you have only to drop in at any rectory where a number of Priests are gathered together. The ceiling will, in all probability, be floating on tobacco smoke, and Fathers Calmody, Dennison, and Blank will be seen in attitudes but little in harmony with their priestly dignity, while chatter and laughter, like that of children at play, will be re-echoing down

the corridor; good-natured banter and stingless raillery will be mingling with details of diocesan happenings; or one of the party, gifted as a raconteur, will be "holding forth," pacing up and down, and gesticulating freely, to give forceful point to his story, the while his companions will be urging him on with side remarks, laughter, and applause. I know that, for myself, one of the pleasantest recreational remembrances I have is of an afternoon in a certain rectory where, for an anniversary celebration, several Priests were gathered, and where, after dinner, the hours were spent singing and declaiming into a dictaphone, then listening, as well as peals of laughter would allow, to the "efforts" as they were returned to us again.

Perhaps, Prudenzia, as you read these lines, you may have a feeling that such ways of passing time are too frivolous for Priests, and deserve condemnation. But stop and reflect. A Priest's life is naturally circumscribed and constrained. The ways open to him to secure diversion and amusement, without at the same time incurring unkind criticism, are limited. And if, in meeting his fellow Priests, he finds opportunity to throw off restraint and indulge

in innocent and harmless recreation, by all means let him do so. Indeed, were any of the older Priests to advise a young man just starting out on his priestly career, it would be to tell him to cultivate, from the very beginning, the practice of calling on his fellow workers; that no matter how studious he may be, or how able to occupy himself pleasantly in his room, the day will dawn when he will find need of that diversion and relaxation which can come only from priestly companionship; and that, if in the early days of his priesthood he neglects to cultivate the practice, he will find it very difficult of attainment when the years of ministry have scattered snows upon his head.

But, Prudenzia, when I reach the "advice station" I know that I have come to the stoping-off place; so, without any more ado, I'll just sign myself,

FATHER SPERINDE.

VIII

ATHLETIC SPORTS

My dear Prudenzia:

A few days after my ordination, and while life in the priesthood was still a realm of mystery to me, a friend of mine, a Priest slightly older than myself, took me for a visit to a Pastor of many years' standing. Of the visit itself I can recall nothing; but I recollect with a remembrance which is still vivid that when it was over, and we stood at the door bidding good-bye, the kindly old Priest shook me warmly by the hand and said, "May the Lord bless you, my dear young Father; and may it be your lot to have the fullness of all the priesthood's joys, circumscribed as they are by a Roman collar." *Circumscribed by a Roman Collar!* It was a strange expression, and at the time I hardly understood its implication. But often since I have had occasion to appreciate the wealth of meaning that lies within it. One such occasion arose to-day.

I was walking down Main Street, when along came my old friend Dr. Drysdale. As is our custom on thus casually meeting, we stopped and moved out to the curb for a chat. Ordinarily the Doctor has some funny little anecdote to tell, but today the chief point of his conversation seemed to be that he had been out to the ball game yesterday, and that while there he had counted as many as eight Priests in the grand-stand. There was nothing startling in the news; but his manner of imparting it conveyed the impression that he sort of resented the presence of the clergy, and wanted me to know it. And as we separated there flashed across my mind the saying of the old Pastor, "May it be your lot to have all the joys of the priesthood, circumscribed as they are by a Roman collar."

Now the priesthood certainly has its joys—greater, I dare say, than any other walk in life; because to no one more than to a good and faithful minister of Christ are the predisposing conditions for genuine joy so completely present. Yet, notwithstanding this fact, it is indeed true that the Priest's joys are circumscribed—not in their height or depth (in these respects they are unbounded), but in

the number and variety of their sources; and of these sources the field of sports is assuredly one.

Now, I would not imply that Priests take no interest in such matters. They do. I would even presume to say that their interest is as keen as that of any other class of men—if not keener; because they are, take them all in all, preeminently men's men, believers in and lovers of all those clean, healthy diversions which full-blooded men instinctively enjoy. Indeed, a goodly percentage of them were, in the care-free days of their college life, athletes themselves—and some, athletes of no mean ability. Sit at table with a group of them, or join them in the smoking-room after dinner, and you will find that a prominent topic of conversation is always athletics—the finer points of inside baseball, the respective merits of this or that leader on the gridiron, the chances of challenger to defeat a champion in a coming bout, or any other of the many points which arise in the varied forms of physical prowess.

However, although Priests, as a class, take a lively interest in sports, and even retain that interest to the end, they do so, as a rule, more

in an academic than in a practical way. Very early in their careers the joy to be derived from participating in or witnessing athletic contests is dimmed for them. The process begins in the seminary. Where I studied, for instance (and it was the same practically everywhere), indulgence in athletics, while not actually frowned upon by the saintly directors, was, at best, only tolerated. The seminarians who did take part were obliged to wear their soutanes; and they might be seen jumping around on the handball court or baseball field with skirts tucked up and a long tail hanging down behind or at the side. That condition, I understand, no longer obtains; but even to this day active interest in athletic games is only mildly encouraged in most of our larger institutions of clerical formation.

Now you can readily imagine that a régime of this kind, stretching over a period of five or six years, at just that time of life when a youth's enjoyment in physical contests is at its zenith, will not only tend to kill all athletic ability in the young man himself, but will be also calculated to dull the enjoyment that comes to him from witnessing the ability when exhibited by others. True, after ordination

there is often a kind of recrudescence of the old athletic spirit, and Priests, here and there, make their occasional way to the baseball field or some other scene of athletic contest. But the indulgence is usually only short-lived; and in its demise the "circumscribing Roman collar" (though materially assisted by the sporadic and unsettled character of a Priest's free time) plays no unimportant part. For whereas the man in ordinary citizen's garb will come and go to baseball games again and again, and no one will comment on the practice, the Priest, with his Roman collar, will be quickly singled out and remembered, and his second or third game will be likely to secure for him the reputation of "fan," if it does not lead to his designation as "quite a sport"—sobriquets which are neither pleasant nor helpful to him.

The upshot of the matter is, that the ordinary Priest settles down to a scheme of life in which the field of sports is confined to the columns of the morning newspaper. And then, as a sort of inevitable sequela, he finds himself gradually giving up physical recreation altogether. This he realizes is bad. He condemns himself for it. He even tries to react against it—buys chest weights, Indian clubs, studies

instructions how to become physically fit without apparatus, makes iron-clad resolutions to walk three miles a day, and even purchases golf sticks and joins a club. But the chest weights soon become stiff for want of use, the Indian clubs gather dust in a corner of his closet, the instruction book is borrowed by some other exercise-resolving clerical friend and never returned, the resolutions to walk three miles a day limp before the third effort if they do not break a leg before starting out at all, while the membership in the golf club gradually resolves itself into the regular receipt of a bill for dues which so exasperates that, at length, the golf sticks are given away and a polite letter of resignation is sent to the club. So, in due and declining course, His Reverence reaches the inevitable—the easy chair and avoirdupois.

Such, Prudenzia, is the position of Priests generally as regards athletics. I know, for I have been through the whole gamut—all save the last stage, the avoirdupois; and actually, I begin to think that I can see even that casting an ominous shadow before.

FATHER SPERINDE.

XIV

THE BISHOP

My dear Prudenzia:

This has been a joyful day in the parish—the Bishop has been here for confirmation. Note, I use the word "joyful"; I use it advisedly; it is the proper word; the expected word; the word which describes most exactly the feelings of the parish generally. But, for myself personally, it needs qualification. True, the time in the house, after the ceremony, was delightful; but that which went before (what I might call the period of official relations) would be best described as "anxious," as indeed "anxious" would best describe most of a Priest's official dealings with his Bishop.

Now please do not misunderstand me; and do not jump at rash, unwarranted conclusions. Bishops are not only princes of the Church, but they are princes of Priests and princes of men—the most exalted embodiments of sacerdotal ideals, the highest ex-

emplars of gentlemanly courtesy and bearing. Otherwise they would not be Bishops. But they are our superiors, divinely constituted, hierarchically established. And there is about their elevation a transcendence and an authority which inspire in us an awe and self-consciousness that merge into anxiety when we are brought into official relations with them; and save for rare and incidental occasions, our relations are always official.

The bases of these relations are varied—as varied, almost, as are the activities of pastoral management; for Holy Church has deemed it wise to reserve to the Bishop the deciding word in practically all of the more important problems of parochial ministration—as, for example, certain matrimonial cases, the more delicate confessional cases, the cases involving improvement or enlargement of the church property, and so forth; and a Priest, to take action in them, must first consult and receive episcopal authority.

Now all of the dealings thus created do not necessitate personal interviews (and the Priest is ever ready to take advantage of an opportunity to conduct his business through the mail); but many do, and they are the ones that

occasion the aforesaid anxiety. When they arise, the Priest prepares their presentation with special care. If the case be simple, he will arrange the points in an orderly manner, in his mind; if it be one involving details and processes, he will jot the sequence down on paper; and thus fortified he will wend his way to the Cathedral. On entering the Bishop's presence his first act will be the fulfillment of the customary courtesy of kissing the episcopal ring; then, on invitation, he will take the chair which is already conveniently placed for him, and proceed at once to the matter at hand, listening respectfully to and noting any suggestion the Bishop may see fit to make. When the matter is finished, the Bishop may feel inclined to enter into friendly intercourse. If so, he will make an opening, and there will follow such conversation as may be expected to take place between two men of common tastes and identical interests. If no opening is made, the Priest will understand that the interview is at an end; and taking his leave in the same formal manner in which he entered, he will make way for some other Priest who, in all likelihood, has been waiting in the ante-room.

Such, Prudenzia, is the usual mode of pro-

cedure. But it does not apply to confirmation. In fact, confirmation differs from all ordinary official relations in that, instead of bringing the Priest to the Bishop, it brings the Bishop to the Priest. And as it differs in procedure, so also it occasions greater anxiety —not only because of the exacting duties attendant on the administration of the sacrament, but also because, by bringing the Bishop to the parish, it opens the way for an examination of the entire ecclesiastical establishment. The trained eye of the Bishop is quick to discern, even without the formality of a detailed investigation (which he is entitled to make and which indeed he may make), any feature out of harmony with canonical form, any deficiency of ornament or rubric, any solecism of ritual or ceremonial; as, also, it is not slow to observe exactitude and perfection in any or all of these departments.

It was these considerations that occasioned my anxiety this morning. True, I had done my best; the children were carefully trained; the altar and sanctuary were tastefully decorated; everything about the church and sacristy accorded with ecclesiastical requirement; and the house—well, for two weeks and more that had

been subjected to a process which had succeeded in making it "shine like a star." But the actuality still remained—the Bishop had to be received (he could not be allowed to come like an ordinary visitor); the processions had to be formed and carried out; the ceremony itself, with all its exacting and unfamiliar details, had to be performed; and, last but not least, the sermon, in the presence of the Bishop, had to be preached. I dreaded them. But, thank the good Lord, they all passed off beautifully. And the Bishop? He was gentleness and kindness itself.

So, Prudenzia, in due course we reached that part of the day's events which, as I told you at the outset, was delightful. Indeed, I would presume to say that the period in the rectory after confirmation is the most enjoyable of all the occasions wherein the Bishop and his clergy are brought together. Neighboring Priests, invited in the Bishop's honor, are present; a dinner (the very best the house can afford) is partaken of; and a conversation that ranges from the weightiest problems of Church and State to the choicest diocesan reminiscence, or latest ecclesiastical anecdote, flows on unceasing. In all the Bishop is the center,

the one to whom, and for whom, radiates all that is brightest and best. And I feel certain that, of all the remembrances that a Priest has of his Bishop none is sweeter, none is more precious, none is more enduring than that of him on an occasion like this, when, surrounded by those who are at once his deepest concern and richest consolation, his Priests, he sits, genial, kindly, affable, listening to and taking part in the conversation, grave or gay, that goes the rounds. That is my remembrance to-day. And thinking it over, as I come to a close, I feel that I may forget the anxiety that attended the earlier part of the day's proceedings, and, with the people, regard the whole occasion as one of joy and happiness.

FATHER SPERINDE.

XV

ASSOCIATES IN THE HOUSEHOLD

My dear Prudenzia:

To-night, as I sit here in my study, everything is as quiet as if I were all alone upon a mountain top. Not a soul is stirring in the house (though it is only a little after nine o'clock), and the street outside is dark and silent. The circumstances make me reminiscent. I look back and think of the old days, when as a curate in a big city parish I had fellow Priests around me. Ah! Prudenzia, if there is any one thing more than another for which, as it seems to me, poor missionary Priests in strange and distant lands are to be pitied it is the denial to them of the joys and consolations that come from companionship and association with their fellows.

And yet, it is quite a wonderful thing, when you stop to think of it—this dwelling together of Priests in a parish house. There is no sacramental union to bind them, no blood relationship, not even the call to community life,

such as is implied in a vocation to the religious state; yet, there they are—men of different ages, different talents, different tastes, different temperaments, all living together, and, as a rule, in harmony, in happiness, in mutual benefit and helpfulness. Here and there, no doubt, will be found a Priest who declares that he prefers to live by himself (as the Priests in Ireland are said to do), but he is an exception; and if you but observe even him, you will note that though indeed he may dwell apart, he is forever taking advantage of opportunities to be off to rectories where he can enjoy, if only for a few moments, the association of his brothers in the ministry.

It is a natural instinct, after all, I suppose, this yearning for companionship. However, in the priesthood it is different. It is not a craving for the intimacy and community of knowledge that obtain in family life, but one that is content with nearness and a facility to fraternize. But within those limits it is of extraordinary depth and strength. The reason lies, I dare say, in the fact that all Priests are taken up with a great common purpose that is largely foreign to outsiders. And this identity of purpose tends to create unity, where

traits and temperament would lead normally to diversity.

Go into any parish house and you will find how marvelously this works out. The Priests in that house see more of one another than the members of almost any family. They are together at meals, after meals, and before bed. And very often, at odd moments during the day, they will drop in upon one another, to smoke a cigarette, to inquire about a sick-call, to advise on some matter connected with a society, or to argue good-naturedly and amicably on this or that topic of public or religious interest. A Priest has his own room in the parish house; but his door is never closed, save for some very special and commonly understood reason. He is accessible to his associates at all times; he is ever ready to put aside whatever he may be doing if one of them drops in upon him. And in adopting this course he is prompted not by priestly courtesy alone, but also by a well-formed conviction that a Priest in a parish house may not live unto himself, and that for the preservation of that harmony which is the sine qua non of parochial efficiency, nothing is more important than a genuine spirit of fraternal cordiality

and kindliness. Pastors especially appreciate the value of this brotherliness, and as a means of promoting it they provide opportunity for the Priests of the household to assemble regularly after dinner, or in the evening, for a few moments of friendly association and general intercourse. I have known houses where hardly a day passed without gatherings of this sort, whereby was realized the spirit as well as the letter of the Psalmist's saying, "It is good and pleasant for brethren to dwell together in unity."

Naturally, of course, where men of different tastes and temperaments dwell together, there will inevitably arise, from time to time, occasions for difference and misunderstanding. Human nature would not be human nature otherwise. But Priests are keenly aware of the evils consequent on allowing ephemeral differences and misunderstandings to develop into cases of settled aloofness or estrangement—evils first of all to themselves, by warping their natures and minimizing their influence, even with the very persons who would seem to sympathize with them; evils to the parish house, by creating an atmosphere which fills it with heaviness and gloom; evils to the congregation,

by giving rise to rumors and gossip which do serious injury to the interests of religion. Hence, they take every precaution to preserve harmony—adopting a policy of "live and let live" in the performance of appointed duties; avoiding in word or act whatever might be calculated to wound individual susceptibilities; yielding, when to insist would bring about a rupture; and ready with frank and complete explanation whenever any course might be open to misunderstanding or misinterpretation. And if, as may happen, notwithstanding all efforts, estrangements really threaten, steps, no matter how trying to pride, are gladly undertaken to nip the rancor in the bud. An instance of this was told to me only recently.

Two confrères, discussing some topic of personal concern, allowed their heated feelings to bring about an angry separation. It was bed time, and each went to his own room, closing his door noisily behind him. But the doors did not long remain closed. Soon one of the Priests quietly emerged from his room, and making his way along the dimly-lighted hall till he reached the other's door, knocked. The usual "come in" rang out in the silence. He entered. Then, in a manly, straight-forward

way, he acknowledged that he had been unreasonable in the argument which had taken place and expressed sorrow. Of course, the other was won over by the evidence of humble priestliness and protested that they were both equally to blame; and a reconciliation resulted which sent each peacefully to bed.

However, instances of even incipient estrangement are extremely rare, and it may be truly said that the outstanding feature of priestly association in parish rectories is friendship. An appointment, made by the Bishop, not through any design, but, it may be, out of mere expediency or opportuneness, brings together two Priests of like tastes and sympathies. Gradually, as a result of this association, there blossoms, like a flower, a friendship that remains a thing of beauty and a joy forever. I would even venture to say that most of the friendships of the priesthood are brought about in this way. I know that I have found it so. And on nights like to-night, notwithstanding the many blessings wherewith the Lord hath blessed me, I am tempted to envy those Priests to whom it is given to live in association with their brothers.

FATHER SPERINDE.

XVI

HIS OWN FAMILY

My dear Prudenzia:

Although I did not see you, I know that you must have been at the funeral of Father Blank's mother yesterday. Wasn't there a throng! And did you ever see so many Priests? Seventy-five at least. Father Blank is very popular with his fellow clergy; but it was not that alone. The clergy generally make an effort to attend the funeral of a Priest's mother, or any other member of the family, for that matter, but especially the mother; and they do so, not only as a mark of respect for the Priest personally, but even more as a manifestation of loyalty to the "cloth."

I saw Father Blank in the afternoon. I came across him accidentally on Main Street. We stopped to speak for a few moments; and I could not begin to tell you how badly I felt for him—not because he showed any special marks of grief, nor because he expressed any

sentiments of poignant sorrow. On the contrary, he looked unusually well, and his only conversation, after thanking me for my sympathy and asking a memento of his mother in my Mass, was very cheerful and bore on casual and unrelated topics. But as I stood there looking at him, I could see the aching void that was in his heart (a void that nothing else in all the world could fill); and my sympathy went out to him.

Ah! Prudenzia, there is something in the relations between a Priest and his mother that is found in no other family bond. It is not that the love between them is necessarily any deeper or stronger. But, in some ineffable way, they seem more to each other. The Priest, on his side, feels, in a peculiar sense, that all that he is is his mother's making. He can look back and see how in countless ways she led him to the priesthood—not by any overt word or act, not even by any definitely expressed wish or hope (indeed, she was strangely reticent on these heads), but by the unconscious influence of her spiritual presence, and the sure and firm guidance of her beautiful Christian teaching and example. In every important turn, in every darkest hour of doubt

and misgiving, she seemed before him, beckoning him on. And when at last he stands before the altar, in full possession of his priestly power and dignity, he knows that it is she, after God, who placed him there; and his every lifting of the Sacrificial Victim is, in some measure at least, a benediction on her. The mother, on her side, sees in her Priest-son the crowning glory of all her motherly efforts and labors—the incarnate expression of her most intimate Christian ideals. To a certain extent she may be said to share the sentiments of the Blessed Mother herself, in that while she feels the right to influence and advise her son, she, at the same time, looks to him as one unspeakably above her. No one reverences the Priest as much as his mother does; no one sees in him so much of the beauty and glory of the priesthood; no one entertains such high hopes of the work that he shall do for Christ. Thus they grow precious to each other, with an understanding that is almost without parallel in any other human relation. And when, at length, the time comes for her to be taken from him, it is as if a part of his very self were taken away; and many things in life assume a different meaning.

One thing especially her going means—it means the end practically of all that he has ever known as "home." This does not imply that a Priest, on his mother's death, takes no longer any interest in his family ties. On the contrary, those ties, in some ways, grow stronger. Between him and the younger children, for instance, there develops a kind of new relation, wherein, to some degree, he takes for them their mother's place. As for the older members, those, it may be, who labored to provide the expenses of his education—towards them he experiences an increased obligation to repay, as far as in him lies, his debt of fraternal love and financial obligation. While as regards his father, it is as if each sought to make up for what the other lost.

Still home is not the same. No longer does he feel a thrill as he mounts the old familiar stairs—because he knows that she will not be there, with that wonderful look of reverential joy shining in her eyes, to greet him. Little by little the old appeal grows weaker. His going "home" now is more through a sense of duty. Gradually his visits grow less. "They will have company," he says to excuse himself; and he thinks of the time when he used to go

at the hour when he knew that she would be alone—to sit about, and relax, and talk, as he could talk only with her. In course of time his room in the rectory takes on a home-like atmosphere which, while she was alive, he never thought it could possess. And he begins to realize, with a new sense of realization, the beauty of the promise made by Christ to His disciples, "Every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for My name's sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall possess life everlasting." And he settles down to a life that is more than ever consecrated to others.

Poor Father Blank realized all this as we stood there talking yesterday; all Priests do. However, he gave no indication of it, but smiled and acted as if nothing unusual had happened. After a few moments, we bade each other good-by, and went our separate ways. But I have not been able to get him out of my mind ever since. Hence these lines.

FATHER SPERINDE.

P. S.—Prudenzia, since writing the above I have been re-reading the beautiful Life of

Cardinal Vaughan by Snead-Cox. In it I came across this passage from an address which the Cardinal made shortly after his father's death. He said: "The most loved ones of my own innermost circle of domestic affection have closed their earthly career. *Now henceforth they call me to meet them in another world. God grant that by fidelity to duty and perseverance unto the end I may become at last worthy to join them in the home of eternal peace and rest.*" I cite the passage because in it is revealed the spirit which enabled Father Blank to seem so indifferent to the death which naturally meant so much to him. You have often told me that you did not understand how Priests appear to take death so easily. Here you have at least one of the reasons.

F. S.

XVII

ILL IN THE RECTORY

My dear Prudenzia:

I know that you will overlook my unusually long silence when I tell you that for the past week I have been ill. My malady was nothing more than a bad cold; but for two days I was abed, and for a couple of days more I could do little else but mope and coddle myself. Fortunately, the worst came between Sundays; that is, though I was not feeling well on Saturday, it was not until Monday that I felt obliged to take to bed, and by the following Sunday I was able to say Mass again. And what a boon that was! You cannot imagine what a great inconvenience it is for a Priest not to be able to do his Sunday work.

Ah! Prudenzia, it is chiefly when a Priest is sick that he realizes how much he is not like the rest of men; or, rather, how much like the rest of men he is, only without their props and

consolations. I think of your father. He catches cold, but almost before he himself realizes it your good mother perceives it and begins to doctor him. She doses him; she ministers unto him; and when, in spite of her efforts, the cold makes headway, and he is obliged to go to bed and have a Doctor, she nurses him—nay, the whole family nurses him. And he is watched and tended with an affectionate devotion which, even more than Doctor or medicine, gets him on his feet again.

How different the Priest! Really I don't know anything more pitiful than a sick Priest, particularly a curate, in a parish rectory—not one who is seriously ill (he soon gets bundled off to the hospital), but one who is just temporarily indisposed with a cold, or indigestion, or a bad case of neuralgia, or the like. His associates, if he happens to be in a house where there are other Priests, are not lacking in kindness; but their offices are ordinarily so clumsy and ineffectual. You lie by the hour in your room all alone. How the long night drags! The daylight comes and you are glad. You hear Father Blank's alarm ring, and in due time his door-latch clicks, and you know that he is going out to say Mass. You sigh,

"No Mass for me to-day," and reach over and take your beads. The hour goes by. Then your door opens and he comes in. He stands at your bedside, looks at you and says, "How's the cold, Father?" "Oh! a little better, thank you." "That's fine; you're looking quite well. You'll be all right again in a day or two; just stay in bed and keep yourself well covered up. Anything I can do for you?" "No, I think not; not just now; I'm getting along nicely." "Good; I'm glad to hear it. There goes the breakfast-bell. I guess I'll be going. So long; I'll drop in again to see you later." And he goes off. After breakfast he has his communion calls and other duties to take up his time, and you may not see him again until just before dinner, when he comes in and sits on the side of your bed and tells you of the happenings of the morning.

Then there is the housekeeper; she is very kind, with an anxiety to do all in her power to give you relief. She comes with such articles of food as are deemed most appetizing and nourishing, and strives in every way to show her interest and concern. But you know how it is. She is not your own; a least only rarely

is it so (for comparatively few Priests have members of their own family around them). And although, on account of the peculiar circumstances of her position, she does not and cannot be expected to maintain towards you the same distant and perfunctory attitude that a domestic would hold toward the man of a house wherein there was some other woman to consult with in the details of the household management, still she does not feel free to do as she would were you not what you are, and you do not feel free to accept what you would were she not what she is: the result is that you "take your medicine" and say nothing. Oh, if only you were sick enough to go to the hospital! But no; you are certain that to-morrow or the next day you will be able to be up and about again; and you turn over and try to go to sleep.

While a Priest is young and strong (and if a young man is not quite strong the secular priesthood is a hard place for him) he is likely to meet these conditions only rarely. But as he gets older, and the infirmities of age grow upon him, he is almost certain to encounter them with periodic frequency. However, he looks upon them as part of "his inheritance

and his cup"; and accepting them with as much of the spirit of Him who had no place whereon to lay his head as he is capable of, he goes dutifully on his way.

FATHER SPERINDE.

XVIII

CEMETERY

My dear Prudenzia:

To-day I went out to the cemetery with the sexton to point out to him the lots that are to be cared for during the coming season, and to go over with him some matters pertaining to a new road that is in course of construction. Oh, this cemetery business! Emphatically, if there is any one thing more than another that does not "belong to a Priest's job" it is that. However, it comes in his day's work (at least it comes in the day's work of a countless number of Priests), and it has to be done; but it is not coveted, I can assure you.

First of all, it takes up an unconscionable amount of time. From early April until July, some part of practically every day (often hours, as was the case this morning) has to be given up to it, either out at the cemetery or in the office, attending to persons who have had or are having work done. The month of May is especially devoted to it, inasmuch as Me-

morial Day has come to be regarded as the one day of the year when the place where our dear ones sleep shall show signs of loving care.

But it is not alone the time it takes that makes it objectionable. Indeed, one would hardly begrudge the time, even were it longer, if results were at all commensurate; for the improvement of our cemeteries is a consummation that the Priest wishes more devoutly than anybody else. But results are not commensurate, nor anything like it. And there's the rub. Now, I am not going to weary you with a long story of the Priest's cemetery pother; but having broached it, I cannot forbear giving you a better insight into it.

Like the recent war, its origin goes back into happenings of the past. In that ancient day, a piece of land was purchased for cemetery purposes in an outlying district. In course of time somebody died, and a lot was chosen. Then came the burial. Probably, after a short time, a stone was raised to mark the place. But just as probably nothing was done. "May he rest in peace" was taken in a literal sense, and the place remained undisturbed until death again laid its icy hand on some other member of the household.

I shall not attempt to assign the exact reason for such a state of things—though I dare say a preoccupation with the spiritual happiness of the deceased, as well as a necessity of bending all efforts to the care of the living, would not be far from accounting for a great deal of it; all I know for certain is that it existed, and that its consequences are a heritage of our day. Our cemeteries, that is, any of them that go back forty or fifty years, are partly taken up with lots wherein certain persons are known to have been buried, but just where no man can tell. And though a few feet, this side or that, may not be of much consequence in a two-acre field, they make a tremendous difference when there is question of laying a husband who has just died by the side of his wife who was buried thirty years ago. Mr. Kelly, the old sexton, God rest him! could put his foot on the spot where every man, woman, and child of the last generation was laid away. But the good man could neither read nor write much less make a plan, and he took his valuable knowledge to the grave with him when it came his turn to die. So it is now the business of some Priest to determine the place. This he does with the help of the new

sexton, who drives a long steel spear here and there in the ground, and is able to tell, as he states, by the progress of the implement, whether or not the particular spot attacked has been opened before. The task is by no means pleasant, and the results are far from being always satisfactory.

Then there is the person who comes in dismay to tell you that the grave wherein her first-born was laid has been opened again. You look at your books and try to convince her that she has made a mistake, that the grave of her child is not at the place of the new opening, but just to one side. But do you think that she does not know? Has she not been praying at that spot for the last sixteen years? So to settle her doubts you cause to be opened the grave which you said was hers; and, sure enough, there lies the plate, now rusted and worn, whereon is engraved the name of her boy.

But by far the most disagreeable feature of the work is the money. Oh, the money! It is money at the door of the church, and money at the offertory, and money at Christmas, and money at Easter, and money! money! money! Well, Prudenzia, there is no one who deplores

it more than the Priest—especially in connection with the cemetery. For, after all, in other parochial works, money-gathering is accepted as intimately essential—it goes with the calling. But in cemetery work it is regarded as a separate business: the Priest assumes the character of a land seller, pure and simple, or a landscape contractor; and he is frequently treated as such.

Your bell rings; you go down to the office, and between you and your visitor there ensues conversation somewhat as follows. "Father, I want to buy a lot." "Very well; how many graves?" "That depends; what is the price of a grave?" You tell him, and he says (or he is likely to say, for it has often been said), "That is rather steep; there must be a lot of money in the cemetery business." You summon up all your patience and proceed to explain that the price is not meant merely as a charge for so much ground, but is fixed in consonance with an attempt to give the whole cemetery an appearance of respectability. You do not convince him, nor do you succeed in disabusing him of his false notion that the cemetery is a "graft." However, he makes his purchase and goes his way.

Or it is a woman, who at the beginning of the season has paid two dollars for the annual care of her lot. It is August and she comes to complain that her graves are in wretched condition, needing fresh loam, and sods and better grading generally. You explain to her that to have all that done would require an outlay much in excess of the two dollars which she has paid. But she is not satisfied and departs with the feeling, effectively conveyed, though she may not express it in words, that she has been mulcted.

Now, Prudenzia, I do not imply that such dealings complete the round of a Priest's cemetery work. They do not. Over against them are to be set many acts which are among the most consoling that a Priest is called upon to perform. For at no time in life are people so helpless, so dependent, so unfit for tasks which are painful and trying as when, after days and nights of sorrow and fatigue, they come to pick out a last resting-place for one who is dear. And to the Priest who is privileged to meet their requirements there is afforded an opportunity for sympathetic helpfulness that is as a light in the midst of dark-

ness, a relief from a load that seemed almost too heavy to bear.

But the joy that comes from the performance of such acts, be it all that it may, does not offset the distaste caused by the others, any more than the sweetness of ointment overcomes the feeling caused by the presence of flies. And a Priest who has the cemetery as part of his work is always glad when the time comes to transfer it to others—at least that part which concerns the selling of lots and the keeping of them in order.

FATHER SPERINDE.

XIX

MONEY-GATHERING

My dear Prudenzia:

In a recent letter I told you that I was re-reading Snead-Cox's fine Life of Cardinal Vaughan. Well, to-day, in the chapter on "Begging Through the Americas," wherein are related the experiences of Father Vaughan (he was "Father" then) on a money-gathering tour through California and the countries to the south of us, I came upon this line: "Though few men ever begged so successfully, he hated the process to the end." As I read the words, I could not help saying to myself, "There is nothing exceptional about that; the same could be said of almost any Parish Priest in the land—though, of course, the same degree of success might not be predicated of all." And I decided to expose the matter to you.

There is no denying the facts—all Parish Priests are beggars, and they hate the process.

True, the word "begging" is no longer used. It has been found too harsh, or too disagreeable, and has given way to the more euphemistic term of "collecting." But "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet," and Parish Priests are all appealing for money, money, money, and holding out their hand or a basket to receive it in—call the process what you will. I know in my own case that the first parochial act I had to perform, even before preaching or saying Mass, was to go through the church for money; and I have been doing the same, or announcing that somebody else would do it, two Sundays out of four, ever since—almost twenty years. And mine is but the common priestly experience, at least in this part of the world.

I have often thought that Priests are so earnest and persistent in this matter of money-gathering that they seem to delight in the progress. As a matter of fact they do delight in big collections; but it is not for the sake of money, but for what the money is going to enable them to do in the way of advancing the cause of religion. Take, for instance, the case of Father Vaughan. After his arduous, painful, and humiliating efforts in the Americas,

he succeeded in raising fifty-five thousand dollars, a vast sum for those days. The success filled him with joy. But the joy arose, not from the amount of money collected, but from the fact that now he would be able to realize the great ambition of his priestly heart—the erection of Mill Hill College, that famous nursery of foreign missionaries from which, ever since, men have been going forth, bringing the light of the Gospel to the dark places of the pagan world.

And what was true of Father Vaughan is true of every other Priest worthy of the name. The great aim of a Priest's life is to advance religion. It was for that he was ordained. But he soon finds that religion cannot be advanced far without material agencies, and that there can be no material agencies without money. So he appeals in season and out of season, and goes through the church, Sunday after Sunday, and journeys from house to house, in summer's sun and winter's sleet. And when, in the end, he sees in his hand the amount necessary for building that church, or enlarging that school, or erecting this or that religious institution, his heart is filled with gladness.

But the process of getting the money—the

begging or collecting act itself—that is an entirely different matter. There is no delight in that. On the contrary, it is fraught with features which make it, as Snead-Cox says it was to Father Vaughan, hateful. In the first place, there is the natural humiliation of it. The Priest is human, no less than other men; yea, he is cultured and refined. Consequently he instinctively shrinks from the begging attitude, to high and low, rich and poor, that the process involves. And though long continuance in it may to a certain extent harden him to it, it is more than likely to be embarrassing to the end. Then there are the rebuffs and the coarse treatment that it occasions, from a class that he is almost certain to find wherever he goes—to be told, for instance, as he enters a house on the annual collection, "You are the third man who has come here to-day for money"; or, "You never come except you want money." The experience is galling. Finally, there are the false and unkind judgments to which it exposes him. For although, from annual reports, the fact should be generally known that the Priest derives his personal income from fixed and definite sources, and has no more right to other parish revenues than a bank treasurer to de-

posits left in his care, still there are those who will persist in regarding him as a sort of family head who, when the actual needs of the establishment are provided for, is free to take as his own what is left; and so they impute his financial zeal to private and selfish motives. This is the most painful feature of all—a painfulness that is all the more keen when, as is frequently the case, the Priest is actually weighed down by the burden of the church's financial obligations.

However, Prudenzia, you must not conclude from this that Priests are desirous of changing their system of church support for that of the Catholic Church in other lands or for that of other religious organizations in this land; such, for instance, as government appropriation or individual or class subsidy. They are not. They know very well, on the one hand, that wherever the Church is supported by the government, it succeeds in maintaining its independence, if indeed it does entirely succeed, only as a result of unceasing strife and turmoil; while, on the other hand, they see that a church which is maintained by the contributions of one or a few rich individuals becomes in the end a kind

of private religious preserve, developing abjectness and subserviency.

So, taking things all in all, the Priest of today, no less than the noble Cardinal Vaughan, is resigned to have it written of him, as a kind of epitaph, "Though he begged, more or less successfully, he hated the process to the end."

FATHER SPERINDE.

XX

THE PARISH SCHOOL

My dear Prudenzia:

Just across the way from my house, in the midst of a spacious park, stands the village school—a fine eight-grade building, with many gables, and the rendezvous, more or less voluntary, of about two hundred and fifty bright-faced youngsters of the surrounding country. Every day I stand at my window and look over at it; and when, with the ringing of the bell, I see the little ones trooping in or out, or scampering hither and yon, like darting flies above a field in summer time, a great yearning wells up in my heart, and I say to myself, "Oh! that a school like that were mine with children who would be my 'charges,' and teachers—members of one or other of those noble bands of religious women who are at once the glory and the bulwark of the faith."

Prudenzia, you do not begin to appreciate what a joy a school is to a Priest. I do not pretend that it is only a joy. Indeed, one Priest

has gone so far as to say that its burdens and trials are the nearest approach on this earth to the pains of Purgatory. And although he was a cynic, who for the sake of making a mot was willing to go to any lengths of exaggeration, still there is no doubt but that the maintenance and management of a school are fraught with difficulty and concern. There is for instance, the task of support—a heavy burden, whose pressure is ever constant, and whose bearing involves monotonous money appeals which may not cease so long as the school continues to exist and function. Then there are the routine matters of supervision: the ever-present anxiety for the school's efficiency in the light of public standards; the upholding of discipline in the case of natures which were born to be refractory and perverse; the dealing with parents whose confidence in the cleverness of their off-spring notoriously dull excites at times a wonder that only adds fuel to impatience. However, grievous as these drawbacks may be, they are nevertheless swallowed up and consumed in the pleasures which the possession of a school affords.

These pleasures are both natural and supernatural. Of the former, the chief are derived,

I dare say, from the children. For, as Cardinal Manning has so eloquently said, "Children come round a Priest, not only by natural instinct, drawn by kindness, but by supernatural instinct as to one who belongs to them by right. They love him with the most unselfish love on earth, and so long as they are innocent it binds them to him by a confidence which casts out fear. The most timid and shrinking come to him as a relief and protection. They tell him everything—their hopes and fears, their troubles and their faults—with an undoubting confidence in his love and care." And the Priest, on his side, reciprocates their feelings. For no one loves children more than the Priest —not this child or that—but children, as children. No one, more than he, sees the appealing side of their natures, the charm and beauty of their innocence, and their artless little ways. This may be so, partly because his character draws from them the sweetest and best that is in them; partly, too, because the nature of his relations with them is such as to leave concealed any ugly aspects of individual traits; but it is due also, and in no small degree, to the fact that the Priest is himself, at heart, a child —one in whom the qualities peculiar to youth

have not been seamed or smeared over by contact with the soul-gouging and soul-begriming things of the rough-and-ready world. And it is from these mutual understandings and sympathies that the Priest's happiness in school-work springs. For it is in the school that they find their fullest expression. In consequence, every visit to the school, no matter how untoward may be the circumstances that arise in the course of it, is certain to yield its sheaf of pleasures. And on occasion, as for instance an anniversary celebration and the like, the joy that it brings is quite ineffable. An illustration will make this clear.

In a certain city parish the Pastor returned from a trip abroad. One of the very first places that he visited was his school. As he approached the hall, there on either side, in solid phalanxes, with an aisle down the middle, stood the children—six hundred of them—all facing the door, all eager, smiling, expectant. He stopped for a moment on the threshold; then started down the aisle, followed by his assistants. Suddenly, ere he had proceeded ten paces, the air was filled with melody, as slowly, with an appealing sweetness that still lingers in my memory, the children sang:

Home again, home again,
From a foreign shore;
Oh! it makes our hearts rejoice,
To see his face once more.

An entertainment, with simple addresses of welcome, followed. Then the Pastor spoke, beautifully and feelingly, ending by granting a holiday. I am certain that the children enjoyed their holiday. But who can express the joy that filled the Pastor's heart!

Sweet, however, as are the natural pleasures of school-work, they are as naught compared to those that are supernatural. Observation, as well as experience, convinces the Priest that the faith of children obliged in these days of religious indifference to grow up in class-rooms from which God is banished is, save for rare exceptions where home training provides an antidote, almost certain to suffer seriously, if not indeed to become so weak as to be rendered incapable of nourishing a strong, virile Catholic life. Hence he looks upon his school as religion's greatest hope and promise. It becomes the apple of his eye, his favorite child, the object of his most devoted efforts and care, the crowning glory of his priestly labors. And when, year after year, he sees going forth from

its walls the succeeding classes of boys and girls, to become the salt of the earth, the leaven whereby the world is to be saved from corruption, his heart rejoices with an increasing great joy, a joy that no man can take from him.

So, Prudenzia, I end as I began: I would that I had a school of my own. Nay; were the way but half opened I should certainly have one. And in so expressing myself, I am but giving voice to the feelings of every Parish Priest who sees himself forced to labor where a school is not.

FATHER SPERINDE.

XXI

INSTRUCTING CONVERTS

My dear Prudenzia:

I feel obliged to take exception to one or two of the statements in your last letter. You may indeed be right in saying that Father Blank exhibits but little enthusiasm in the religious instruction of your friend's prospective husband (though I feel certain that there is a sound reason for his attitude, and I shall tell you before closing what I think that reason is); but when you go on to say that Priests generally show but little interest in convert-making you are absolutely wrong. True, Priests may not evince any marked initial activity in seeking out prospective converts; but that is because in their eyes the practice smacks of proselytism, and all proselytizing methods, whether exhibited by Catholics or Protestants, are peculiarly odious to Priests. If a man is hungry, they will feed him; if he is thirsty, they will give him to drink; but they disdain to take

advantage of his condition to force him to give up his present religion and accept Catholicism. However, given the case of a person who exhibits an inclination, be that inclination ever so slight, to know the teachings of the Church, they are ready, I would say without exception, to instruct him; nay, they are zealous and anxious to do so. Naturally, the work may not always be pleasant; it may be beset at times with inconveniences, wearinesses, and annoyances. Still it is prosecuted with perseverance and faithfulness for the spiritual satisfaction that comes from bringing a soul to the knowledge of the truth.

I remember of myself once having had a man who reached the point of being almost a nuisance—if you will pardon a term of such opprobrious connotation. He was a college instructor — gifted, learned, thorough. For weeks and weeks he came. I explained to him, as best I could, the various points of Catholic doctrine. Intellectually, he accepted everything. In fact, he had himself read a great deal of St. Thomas, and was in demonstrative admiration of the beauty and cogency of the Catholic system. Still, he could not believe. And he wanted to believe. He attended

Mass, he prayed, he even wept, and I saw the large tears standing in mute appeal upon his cheeks. I was at my wits' end. I did not know what to do with him. One night he came. He had already called in the morning. Indeed, he had reached that point where he would come at almost any hour the spirit moved him, sometimes two or even three times a day. It was seven o'clock. In desperation I said, "I really do not see what more I can do for you than I have done. However, there is one thing. This is Holy Hour night at the Cathedral. Go; be not over-anxious about entering into the details of the service; but just drift along, realizing as well as you can that all that is being done is done in honor of Our Lord who sits enthroned in the Blessed Sacrament upon the altar. Ask Him for faith; beg of Him to open your eyes that you may see." He went; and I, going about my duties, forgot him. But at nine-fifteen, on going down to the office in response to the bell, there he was again. But now, how changed! Instead of dark looks of doubt and despair, his countenance gave forth beaming lights of joy. And before I could utter a word he cried out, "The Blessed Sacrament has opened my eyes.

Everything is now clear. I have no longer any doubts. Baptize me." And baptize him I did, and he became a fervent Catholic. Also, I may add, to finish the story, before six months were over he had passed from the Church Militant to the Church Triumphant. He died suddenly while seated at his desk at a government station at Tucson, Arizona.

Now I cite this case as possessing features which, on their face, would seem to make my work of instructing extremely annoying. Still, though at times it was trying and inconveniencing (he seemed such a hopeless case, yet came so often), it was never unpleasant, because the man was interested, earnest, and sincere. And whenever these qualities are present, Priests are not only ready to bear with circumstances which would naturally tend to create impatience and annoyance, but they are happy to do so. And I am glad to say that the vast majority of convert cases are of this kind.

However, there are exceptions. Occasionally a person will come in whom the qualities of interest, earnestness, and sincerity are manifestly perfunctory. And though such instances are rare, most Priests have had them. For I would have you know, Prudenzia, that

instruction of converts is by no means an exceptional duty in a Priest's work. There is no country Pastor, no matter how small his parish, who does not have it to do occasionally; whereas in the city, Priests are scarcely ever free from it. The cases to which I refer are usually of men or women, more often of men, who are looking to matrimony. Now matrimony in itself is as proper an incentive for entering the Church as any other; and, as a matter of fact, it is very common. But, at times, it is not so much an incentive as a goad. The Catholic party will not marry a non-Catholic, and the non-Catholic is ready to take any step, no matter what, rather than look elsewhere for a mate. So he comes. After a few instructions, the Priest asks him, as an earnest of his intention, to attend Mass on Sundays. But he rarely goes. "Circumstances," he says, "make it too difficult." He is irregular at instructions, but he is never without a plausible excuse for his absence. He has no difficulties and asks no questions; but he studies the catechism and is ready with mechanical answers. The Priest is not entirely satisfied with conditions, and he fails to develop much enthusiasm; for it is difficult to develop heat in a room that is chilled

by an iceberg; it is hard to become eloquent when speaking to a waxen image. But he cannot say for certain that there is a lack of the necessary dispositions; so he hopes for the best and does what he can. And when, at length, the man is received and the marriage is performed, he prays that the life of the couple will be harmonious and blessed. But he has had cases of his own, and has seen those of others, where the faith of the convert waned with the honeymoon; and he is not over-sanguine.

Now, Prudenzia, I do not know your friend's prospective husband, but I do know Father Blank. And I feel confident that if there are unsatisfactory circumstances surrounding the instructions the fault lies not in any lack of zeal on the part of the Priest, but in the lethargy and indifference of the convert-to-be. In fact, I should not be surprised if Father Blank soon had a good, plain talk with your friend, telling her just what conditions are, and warning her of the dubious character of her prospects. That is what most Priests in the circumstances would do.

In conclusion, I would say that I am glad that it is not yourself who is involved. And I would advise you not to follow in your friend's

footsteps. See to it that no non-Catholic young man is ever allowed to become a frequent companion, much less an intimate friend. Thereby you will be avoiding at least one, and probably the most disastrous, of the many shoals that are said to lie concealed in the matrimonial sea.

FATHER SPERINDE.

XXII

"FOREIGNERS"

My dear Prudenzia:

Whatever else a Priest's work may or may not be, it is never monotonous. Even those duties which seem to be the most routine have about their individual performance a freshness and distinctiveness that make them interesting. Take, for instance, a sick-call that I had this morning. It was to a member of the so-called foreign colony of my parish—an elderly man who, with his wife and two grown-up sons, lives in "one of the company's houses." The man is unquestionably possessed of a deep sense of spiritual things. Of this I have had innumerable evidences in the course of my visits to his home, particularly when I gave him the last sacraments. But save for an occasional Palm Sunday or Easter, he never came to Mass, and it is years and years since he received holy communion; the same is true also of his wife and children. When I called this morning I saw clearly that he was dying.

I said to him, "It looks to me as if you were not long for this world. You have often told me that you were sorry that you had not been more faithful to your religious duties. Now ought you not to be equally sorry that your sons are following in your footsteps, and would you not be glad of an assurance before dying that they will go to Mass and the sacraments after you are gone?" He burst into convulsive sobs and assured me that nothing could be dearer to his heart. "Well," I said, "if you are really in earnest I shall call the young men in, and while they kneel here before you, you will get them to promise to be faithful to the practices of religion." "Yes, yes," he said, "call them in." I threw open the door leading to the next room, and in they came—two fine-looking young fellows, between twenty and twenty-five years of age. I told them what had taken place, and asked them if they were ready to make the promise. They both eagerly declared that they were. And there, kneeling by the bed-side, their hands folded, and great tears rolling down their cheeks, they repeated after their sobbing father the words which were to bind them to be faithful to Mass and sacraments.

"Very impressive," I hear you say, "but why so spectacular?" Ah! Prudenzia, you do not understand. There is no more difficult task for a Priest with a sprinkling of "foreigners" in his parish than to get them to live up to the requirements of the Church; and he has recourse to any expedient, no matter how spectacular, if he thinks it will help him. Ordinarily he has but very little reason to doubt the religious spirit of these people; he goes into their houses and sees holy pictures and rosaries and shrines and burning lights; he sees how married couples come almost annually with their off-spring to be baptized; he finds that at marriages and funerals no religious display can be too lavish or devotional; he is aware that carefully worked out schemes to win them to heretical practices fall to the ground; he talks with this one and that and ascertains that in the "old country" church-going was as natural as eating; still, save for a comparatively small number, not only the older generation, who may not know English, but even the children who have been born and brought up in this country, remain away from Mass and rarely if ever, except when dying, receive the sacraments.

And try as he will he cannot get them to change—at least not in any great numbers. He reads articles purporting to help him; he enters to the best of his ability into their declared exceptional circumstances; he eliminates to the vanishing point all ordinary financial obligations; he dispenses in their case with fixed hours for baptisms, and the like; he complies, in so far as he is familiar, with their peculiar national or local customs; he serves them devotedly in times of illness or need; he makes himself as gracious and agreeable as his natural disposition will admit on the occasion of the annual visitation or whenever circumstances bring him into relations with them; but all in vain, or practically in vain. For though he may succeed in winning pleasing expressions of their kindly feeling and respect, when it comes to a question of Mass and sacraments he gets only the same old response, "Got no time"; "Got holy picture in my house, God will hear me there just the same as in church"; "Will go bye-and-bye."

For a time the Priest is not only saddened by this state of affairs, but he really feels that in some way or other he may be to blame—a lack, probably, of zeal. Gradually, however,

as a result of the futility of many plans and efforts, he concludes that he is not to blame, but that he has been mistaken in supposing that, just because people come from a country where Church practices involve no trial or inconvenience, they will of necessity observe those same practices in a country where observance entails sacrifices and non-observance occasions no loss of social prestige; and he decides that there must exist some intangible factors—factors of early religious training, or of national temperament, or of changed environment—that make the attitude of these people towards religious service a matter beyond his control. As a consequence, though he does not slacken in his efforts (for he knows that they are of his flock, even though they will not hear his voice, and that it is his duty to do all that he may to lead them and to nourish them), and though he does not cease to be saddened by their neglect, still he no longer experiences twinges of culpability, and bears with conditions in a greater spirit of patience and resignation.

Take, for instance, the case of my young men this morning. They are really types. They speak English, they have a genuine sense

of spiritual things, they know the obligations of faith, there is nothing to prevent their coming to Mass and sacraments, they have promised fidelity—and if they do not come, what is one to do? He certainly cannot go out and force them to come. Doubtless as time goes on this condition will improve; but in the meantime it is a source of no little preoccupation and sadness to the Priest who has to face it.

FATHER SPERINDE.

XXIII

THE RICH

My dear Prudenzia:

I must tell you of a visit that I made yesterday to my city friend, Father Harradan. I had intended to take dinner with him (though I had sent no word beforehand to say that I was coming); but when I arrived the housekeeper informed me that he had gone out at twelve and would not return until two-thirty. I was for going away, but she kindly volunteered to get dinner for me (Father Harradan is without an assistant); and as it was rather late to go elsewhere I accepted. After eating I went upstairs to the pastor's study to wait for him, passing the time reading my Office and looking over his library. I feared that word would come over the 'phone at any minute that he had changed his mind and would not be back until supper. But no; at half past two precisely in he walked, showing delightful

surprise at seeing me and giving me voluble and cordial welcome.

I do not think that you have ever met Father Harradan. He is about forty-five years of age, tall, fair, with an unusually pleasing and open countenance—a man whom once having seen you would be likely always to remember. As a Priest, there is nothing very exceptional about him—just such an earnest, devoted Pastor as you would be likely to find almost anywhere. But he has an honest, straightforward manner that endears him to all who know him; though I must confess that to me his charm is somewhat marred by a tendency to philosophize and make long speeches.

His first act, after entering, was to remove the long coat that he had been wearing and don his soutane. And still buttoning the soutane's innumerable buttons, he emerged from his bedroom and came over to where I was sitting. Looking down archly at me, he said, "I've been dining with my one wealthy parishioner." "Is that so?" I replied, in an apparently surprised tone. Then, wishing to draw him out, I added, as if to chide, "I did not think that you made distinctions between your parishioners." He made no answer, save to throw back his head

and give a short laugh. Then, making his way over to a small side table, he proceeded deliberately to fill his pipe. (I had already helped myself to one of his cigars.) When he had filled and lighted his pipe, he came over, rubbing his hands as he came, and seated himself in a large Morris chair opposite me. For a moment he sat back, his legs crossed, puffing slowly at his pipe and watching the smoke rise towards the ceiling. He had not uttered a word from the moment I chided him; neither had I. I was waiting. Suddenly he bent his gaze on me and said, more as if musing to himself than speaking to me, "I suppose that, on the face of it, it may look like discrimination; and no doubt there are people in my parish who, if they knew of it, would remark unfavorably upon it. But after all, there is nothing unpriestly or reprehensible in it; any Priest, in like circumstances, would do as I did." He paused as if waiting for me to make some comment. But I, realizing that he was in for one of his long speeches, said nothing. In a moment he continued:

"I realize very well that a Priest ought not to show any partiality, any favoritism, in the performance of his priestly duties. He is or-

dained for all—rich and poor, ignorant and learned, innocent and sinful, old and young. All have equal right to his guidance, his kindly encouragement, his fatherly care. Were he to take any other course he would be not only setting himself down as unworthy of his calling, but he would be forfeiting that independence of word and action which is one of the unique prerogatives of Catholic Priests as compared with the clergy of other religious organizations. However, the making of himself all things to all men does not imply that he should disregard the fundamentals of worldly form and convention. No man should. St. Paul has made that clear. 'Render to all men their dues,' he said; 'tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.' And even Our Lord Himself did not feel free to act differently. True, it was said of Him that He did not care for any man, inasmuch as He did not regard the person of men. And this characterization has often been taken to mean that He took no cognizance of the worldly or social condition of the people. But it must be remembered that the words of this characterization were uttered by one whose only purpose in speaking

was to entrap the Saviour in His speech. And Our Lord repudiated the implication by calling the man a hypocrite and giving expression to that momentous pronouncement that has served as the foundation of the social order ever since, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.' And though Our Lord loved the poor and lived with the poor and chose the pillars of His Church from among the ignorant and lowly; and though neither height nor depth nor riches nor power nor life nor death could deter Him from denouncing evil-doing wherever it existed, still He did not fail to accord a dignified respect and consideration where worldly convention had established them. And neither should you nor I.

"If, for instance, the Governor of the State were a Catholic and a member of my parish, although, as regards services which go with priestly ministration he would be no whit to be preferred to the man who blacked his boots in the state-house corridor, still, as regards externals of social form and convention, he would have a right to expect from me, no less than from any other man, such indications of respect and deference as are fittingly accorded to his position. And as for authority, so also for

other worldly distinctions—wealth, and rank, and title, and so forth—provided, be it said, that there be no stigma upon the manner in which they were secured. And when, in addition, there is to be found an exemplary Christianity, then the evidences of respect and deference ought to be even more marked, though, of course, fawning or cringing are to have no place—these are despicable, especially in a Priest.

"And now, as regards the people with whom I dined to-day. They are a childless old couple, the man a retired bridge builder. They have money, heaps of it; but they are neither purse-proud nor disdainful. On the contrary, they are humble and serviceable, giving with a lavish hand whenever opportunity is offered them to do good. As to their religious practice, they are exemplary. The woman is daily at the altar-rail, and the man is always to be found in his place at the communions and meetings of the Holy Name Society. Occasionally, not more than two or three times a year, they ask me to take dinner with them. Candidly, I had much rather not go, for, like most Priests, I do not care for that sort of thing. However, unless absolutely prevented, I accept the invita-

tion, feeling that in doing so I am in no way slighting anybody else, but simply giving 'honor where honor is due.'

"And now," he said suddenly, "what is your opinion of the matter?" "Well," I answered, "no one could take exception to what you say. However, I hardly think that you have brought out quite as clearly as you should that the deference and respect paid by Priests to wealth, position, or rank, as such, are merely formal and conventional. For to no one, more than to a Priest, is it so true that

> 'The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
> The man's the gowd for a' that;'—

and were a Priest to follow his natural inclination he would much prefer the society of simple, God-fearing people to that of persons whose only claim to distinction is that they had been successful in financial or political pursuits." "Oh! of course," he protested quickly, "that was understood. And——" But before he could proceed further, I, with an idea of changing the subject, interposed, "But what would the Bolsheviki and Communists think of your views?" "Ha! Ha! Ha" he laughed, immediately seeing my aim. And the conversa-

tion forthwith turned to the chaotic condition of the social and industrial order.

It was five o'clock when I reached home. But I had a delightful visit, and besides, I was provided with this rather prosy discussion which I gingerly present for your esteemed consideration.

FATHER SPERINDE.

XXIV

THE POOR

My dear Prudenzia:

I had a rather distressing experience in the office this morning. The office, as I dare say you realize, is, like the net spoken of in the Gospel into which came all manner of fishes, a place to which the people come with their varied petitions and proposals. For the most part, certainly, they are of the congregation, intent on matters more or less directly related to parochial affairs—to arrange a marriage, to make known a sick-call, to take the pledge (though Prohibition has made this once frequent call a comparatively rare occurrence), or to obtain advice on one or other of the many problems that arise in the lives of bona fide Catholics. There are others, however (and the number is by no means inconsiderable), who have only extraneous and unrelated matters to present. Now it will be a very trimly-gowned lady who has favorably impressed the house-

keeper, but who on interview turns out to be a book-agent with Stoddard's Lectures; and while you look on in protesting amazement, she proceeds to extract from various cavernous pockets, concealed in the folds of her dress, samples of the de luxe edition, "specially priced for the clergy." Or, again, it will be a clean-cut individual, with hair brushed back, like men pictured in advertisements of the house of Kuppenheimer, who has come out of special regard for your conservative calling to offer you shares in a newly-discovered oil-well that is absolutely certain to make enormous profits and to become the marvel of the investment world. This type frequently exhibits an exasperating assurance and at times develops an impertinence that makes your gorge rise. It was one such that occasioned my distress, already referred to.

He had been standing at the table in the middle of the office but came forward with an evident expression of eager pleasure to greet me as I entered. My manner was hardly reassuring, for I neither sat myself nor invited him to sit. However, he seemed not at all disconcerted, but proceeded at once with his well-prepared harangue. Ere he had gone far I in-

terrupted him to say that financial projects had no attraction for me, and that he was only wasting his time and mine by developing the subject. Ordinarily a statement of this kind is sufficient to take the wind out of the sails of the beaming promoter; and though, for a few moments, he may try another tack to rouse your interest, a determined stand will convince him of the futility of his course and send him away. This morning, however, the statement seemed only to nettle my visitor; and instead of the customary luffing up for a fresh point of vantage, he drifted off into vague remarks about Priests being as anxious as other men for "easy money"; and "believe me," he continued, "when they get it, they know how to hold onto it." I unwisely asked him what he referred to; whereat he launched forth upon a cock-and-bull story about some Priest or other who, on being appealed to one cold winter's night by a homeless lad, callously closed the door in the poor boy's face. "And," he added, as a final shot, "as far as I can see, a needy person appealing to any Priest has but a poor chance of obtaining relief."

That was enough; I told him that I did not care to listen to him any further, and the inter-

view came to an end. But his words about the indifference of Priests to the needs of the poor, though I knew them to be but the maunderings of a disappointed, irresponsible person, made a deep impression on me, and kept coming back to my mind all day long to annoy and depress me. I do not know why this should be, unless that several times recently I have heard anecdotes which would seem to indicate that what the young man had the effrontery to say so openly is often said secretly (or at least something like it) not only by non-Catholics, who are ready to believe almost anything about a Priest, but also by Catholics, who ought to know better. And though I am certain that you are not of this class, still I feel that I want to state the Priest's attitude to somebody and I have selected you.

Now there can be no doubt but that at times, in view of the many transient calls for assistance for which there is no time to make investigation, a Priest may make a mistake, and a really meritorious applicant may fail to obtain relief. It is to be regretted; and by no one will the regret be more keenly felt than by the Priest himself if he learns of it. But to say that Priests as a class are indifferent to the

needs of the poor, or are unwilling to come to their assistance, is the grossest calumny.

As a matter of fact, though a Priest is dependent on money and the things that money can buy no less than any other man, though his condition in old age or illness without means is as much more pitiful than that of others as his position is more aloof and exalted, and though his income, save for exceptional cases, is notoriously small, still he is (I say it boldly) the most unfailing, consistent and dependable friend and helper that the poor man has. True, he himself may not proclaim his generous deeds (he would be unworthy of his calling if he did), but the poor themselves and those who preside over institutions devoted to their interests could tell the tale. How comes it otherwise, think you, that the path to the rectory door, more than that to any other door in all the town, is worn by the feet of life's unfortunate ones? Or how is it that it is especially to Priests that superiors of homes and asylums appeal when they are in need of funds?

The truth is, Prudenzia, that a Priest could not help but be open-handed with the poor. Were there no other more exalted motives to urge him, there would be the attitude of the

people themselves. For he knows that if his people give to him cheerfully and generously of their hard earnings and small surplus for Masses and other religious offices, they do so with the expectation that what they are giving will, to some extent at least, be distributed to the poor—that the Priest will act, in a sense, as their almoner. And a Priest who would fail to meet that expectation would be harassed by a feeling not unlike that which afflicts a man who has obtained money under false pretences. Furthermore, he knows that although his people are glad to see him enjoy all the comforts that go becomingly with his state, and will never cease, no matter what he does, to show reverence for his office, they will resent evidence of grabbing, or niggardliness towards the poor (qualities that they are quick to discern), and will withhold from him who is guilty their loyalty, confidence, and affection. And the loyalty, confidence, and affection of his people are what no Priest is willing to forego; for without them he is a most unhappy man.

However, there are other and more exalted motives; and the chief of them is this: by the very fact that a Priest is a Priest he covets to

be not unlike Him whose imitator he professes to be. He could not be true to his vocation otherwise. But he knows that in no way can he be so certain that he is not unlike His Master as that he should be beloved of the poor. Hence he craves evidences of that love. And though he may not dare to say of himself what holy Job in his profound humility dared to say, still he is at least anxious that others may be able to say, as a most fitting memorial of him when he is gone—"Because he delivered the poor man that cried out and the fatherless that had no helper, the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon him; and he comforted the heart of the widow. He was an eye to the blind, and a foot to the lame; he was the father of the poor, and the cause which he knew not he searched out most diligently."

The Priest knows that this attitude will never be properly appreciated by the world; for the world will never cease to judge him falsely, as it did his Master before him. To that he is resigned. But that it should not be appreciated more universally by his own people is one of the paradoxes of his ministry, and a cross that it is difficult to bear.

FATHER SPERINDE.

XXV

SICK-CALLS

My dear Prudenzia:

I have just returned from a sick-call to a cancer patient on the other side of the town. This is the first real sick-call that I have had in over a month (for the parish is small and the place notoriously healthy); and I cannot begin to tell you how much satisfaction I derived from it. Before coming here I used to have a great many sick-calls, sometimes as many as four or five a day, and one night, between eleven and four, I had three. I will admit that at times, with the rushing out in the middle of the night, or the plowing of my way through the stinging sleet of a winter's day, or the hurrying along on parching pavements of an August afternoon, I almost felt them to be a burden. I say "almost," because really no matter how frequently sick-calls come or how naturally trying the circumstances under which they are made, they are ever among the

sweetest and most precious duties, nay prerogatives, that a Priest is called upon to perform. You cannot appreciate, no lay person can, the glow of sensations that fill a Priest's heart as he walks through the city streets, bearing on his breast His Eucharistic Master—a glow which would seem almost to be a foretaste of that bliss of which the Apostle spoke when he said, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man what things God hath prepared for them that love Him."

I am sure that I shall never forget my first sick-call. It was to an erysipelas patient, who was lying at death's door in the contagious section of the Garfield Hospital in Washington. With much trepidation of spirit, and a genuine prayerfulness of heart, I carried out the few ceremonies of transferring the Host from the tabernacle to the Pyx, and issued forth, through the sacristy door, to the street outside. It was a sweet, sunshiny day in early April—a Washington April—and the spirit of glorious spring was peeping through every bush and shrub along the way and twittering timidly in the branches of every tree. But though I was aware of it all, as also I was of

the people who passed me by, I was not keenly conscious of it, for my faculties were all turned inward to where my whole being was suffused in a kind of ecstatic glow, mingled with which, however, there was, strange to say, a vague impelling desire to be at my journey's end, where I might be relieved of the very Burden whose presence brought my ecstasy about. Arriving at the hospital, I was clothed in a white robe which covered me from head to foot, and ushered into the sick-room. Everything necessary for the administration of the sacraments had been prepared (as is now the case in all well-regulated public institutions) —the little table with its freshly-laundered white cover, the two lighted candles, the crucifix, the holy water, the spoon, and the glass of drinking-water. Before looking at the patient I knelt down and deposited my precious Burden on the table, reciting the while the customary prayers, or rather I should say, stammering them—for though I knew them by heart, the having to say them for the first time in the presence of imminent death quite upset and confused me. Then I turned to the bed. On it lay a figure, man or woman I could not tell (though the call had been to a woman), for the

head was wholly concealed by a dark ointment-smeared mask. True, the eyes, nose, and mouth were visible, but they also were smeared with ointment and were hardly recognizable. Drawing a chair to the bed, I sat down and heard the woman's confession. I know that I did my best in the way of spiritual exhortation, for I was deeply moved; but even as I spoke I kept thinking to myself how inadequate my words must seem to one whose closeness to eternity would naturally evoke spiritual longings that no earthly words, no matter how fervent, could adequately satisfy. Then reciting the prayers of the ritual with all the earnestness of which I was capable, I gave her the last sacraments.

Such, Prudenzia, was my first sick-call; and in connection with it I have only to add, that one of the most satisfying experiences of my priestly life was to see this woman, of whom the Doctors had said, "She cannot live," slowly but surely, day by day, as I returned, emerge from the shadow of death and stand in the full light of restored health and vigor.

Now I would not have you think that in this account I am describing experiences that are confined to a first sick-call, or such as are

peculiar to me personally. Eliminating the little details naturally incidental to a first performance, and changing the circumstances of time and place, they are practically the same for all sick-calls and for all Priests engaged in parish work.

No doubt, often, of a morning, you have remarked your Priest on his way with the Blessed Sacrament to the sick. There is about him a dignity of carriage, a solemnity of manner, a disregard of passing things, and a manifest pre-occupation with his internal communings that indicate what his mission is, just as clearly as if, like Priests in Catholic countries, he were accompanied by an acolyte with candle and sacring-bell.

Sick-call work never becomes routine. Its very nature precludes that; and besides, there is about it a number of varying circumstances which give to every call the nature of a new action. And whether the visit be to a devout young woman whose unnatural brightness of eye and flushed cheek denote the presence of that inward fire whose burnings will not cease until they leave her fair form cold in death; or to an aged man who, after years spent in the practices of the prodigal, desires now, that

the substance of his life is wasted, to return to his Father's house; or to a little child whose innocent life is ebbing untimely away as the result of a sudden accident—it matters not. There are always and ever about it elements that call forth from the Priest qualities that are peculiarly his by virtue of his sacred character, and for the sake of exercising which he felt himself especially called to the work of the ministry.

And I dare say that there is no duty which a Priest has to perform wherein he is made so keenly to feel both his supernatural power and his crushing helplessness. For, on the one hand, he sees again and again how most obdurate natures become like wax before the flame of his priestly mission—hearts hardened by sin melting into tears at the story of God's unbounded mercy: while, on the other hand, he finds himself frequently forced to embarrassing and protesting silence before the all-devouring faith of men and women who will persist in asserting that if he but wish it, he can, by the simple touch of his anointed hand, dispel the pain or malady that afflicts them. And just as his sick-calls reveal to him both his power and his impotence, so also are they at

once the source of his truest joys and keenest sorrows. For what Priest's heart does not find greatest happiness in the innumerable blessings which attend his ministry in the homes of the sick; as, also, where is the Priest who is not cast into deepest sadness at the sight of death and agony which he is powerless to stay?

Yes, Prudenzia, sick-calls are a duty rich and precious in the eyes of the Priest; and his great ambition and prayer are that growing ever more and more in zeal and unction, he may be able to fulfil them with an ever-increasing benefit to his own soul and to the souls of those committed to his care.

FATHER SPERINDE.

XXVI

IN THE PULPIT

My dear Prudenzia:

If humility be the crown of saintly virtues, then I fear that whatever virtues I may possess will have to go around bare-headed. This knowledge I have always had, but it was brought home to me with a fresh consciousness by an incident which happened yesterday.

We are having a Mission. Unquestionably the missionary is a wonderful preacher—presence, diction, imagery, action, matter, treatment, everything is of the highest order. And the people are very properly filled with admiration of him. This, in itself, is all very good; I am delighted with it. It means that my Mission is going to be a great success.

But yesterday one of my outspoken parishioners, glowing to me over the brilliant oratorical qualities of our missionary, instituted an odious comparison between him and the parochial clergy, declaring that the latter, as a

rule, gave but little thought or care to the matter or the manner of their discourse, being content with a perfunctory delivery of stock arguments and unctuous commonplaces. I was indignant; and I gave way to ebullitions which, as I have already said, revealed anew how little of the meekness of Moses there is in my make-up.

Now, Prudenzia, there is no doubt but that, as a rule, Priests in parishes do give less attention to the nicer details of preaching than do Priests engaged in missionary work. But the reason is obvious. The effectiveness of a missionary's ministry depends mainly upon his preaching. He comes, the people hear him; he goes, and all, or almost all, that they have to influence them is the remembrance of what he said. Naturally, therefore, the matter and manner of his discourse will be all-important and will receive an extraordinary amount of care and attention.

With the Priest in parish work, however, the case is different. He is the object of the people's daily observation. He visits them in their illness, consoles them in their sorrows, marries them, baptizes them, rebukes their willfulness, encourages their efforts to be good.

Thus his whole life becomes a sermon. Nay, his very walking through the parish streets is preaching. He may be conscious that he has but a poor presence, weak voice, thick utterance, sterile imagination, and that he is callous to the niceties of graceful expression, but he is not cast down, because he feels that even without these gifts he may still be able to bring his parish to a high degree of spirituality as well as to a generous expression of Church loyalty and devotion.

As a consequence, the Priest in a parish comes to regard the sermon as but one of many stones in the arch of his parochial duties. This does not mean that he looks upon it as of little importance. On the contrary, just as he is conscious that without manifest priestly virtue the greatest eloquence is but sounding brass and tinkling cymbal, so also he is no less keenly aware that given that virtue (which, thank God! is the common possession of our priesthood) his power for good will be by so much the more enhanced as his utterances in the pulpit are the more effective.

But his aim is modest. He has but little ambition to shine as an orator. The rhetorical, grandiloquent, rococo style has no attraction

for him. To utter with directness and sincerity the simple truths about the love of God and the wickedness of sin is all that he aspires to. But modest as is his aim, he does not imagine that it is easy of attainment. Rather, the duty of speaking to the same audience fifty-two Sundays in the year, often two or three times a Sunday, year in and year out, and of saying, not indeed things new, but old things in a new way, becomes in his eyes a formidable task. And no matter how insouciant he may appear to some who hear him (it may be more to criticize than to profit), he is ever striving to make the most of the gifts that God has given him. Why, within the narrow circle of my own limited acquaintanceship, I know many Priests who, after several years in the ministry, take lessons in vocal expression. And this is, as it were, but a pin-hole peep into what may be said to be the general priestly attitude. True, as a Priest grows older and the activities of his office become more varied and enlarged, he may not find it possible or deem it necessary to give to the actual preparation of the sermon the same meticulous care and painstaking labor that marked his earlier efforts. He, no less than the members of other learned profes-

sions, deems himself qualified and entitled to depend, for ordinary occasions, on general knowledge and accumulated experience. But though he should live to celebrate his golden jubilee (and I have been associated with Priests who were not far from that venerable distinction), he never ceases to take the task seriously and to fulfill it to the best of his ability.

As regards the satisfaction that he takes in the work, it is for the most part supernatural. Indeed, no joy that comes to him is keener than that derived from the knowledge that "on such a day and in such a place a word of his did sting a conscience, and stir a heart, and move a will, and bring a soul to God." At times it carries with it also a natural pleasure—a glow that arises from a consciousness of having acquitted himself at least not too unworthily. Of ordinary outside encouragement he receives but little. Priests of a household, deeming no doubt that where congratulations may not always be deserved 'twere better to preserve a conventional silence, rarely comment on each other's efforts; while the appreciation of the congregation is known, for the most part, only from the observance of more

or less intangible effects. Very different is his position from that of a certain "preacher" of whom I learned some time ago.

This clergyman kept a card system of his sermons; and his cards, filled out with his personal record were reproduced by the enterprising publishers of the system and sent broadcast to the clergy for advertising purposes. A set reached me. One of them was filled out somewhat as follows:

Title of Sermon.....Patriotism and Poetry
Place of Delivery.Spooky Lane Congregational Church
Time of Delivery.....Whitsun, 1914.
Comments—After service large numbers of the congregation came forward to congratulate me and ask me to repeat.

The Priest looks for no congratulations, much less requests to repeat, from his congregation; and were he to receive them, openly and frequently, he would begin to wonder if he were not being taken for an actor instead of an Ambassador of Christ. On the contrary, of the few rumors that do reach him the greater number are more than likely to partake of the nature of the comments reproduced at the beginning of this letter. But though he may feel those comments keenly and

even resent them hotly, as did I, he himself is aware that no matter how hard he may try he is far from reaching the ideal. Rarely, if ever, is he wholly satisfied with his efforts; and he is continually resolving to do better the next time. But he never utterly despairs, because he is deeply penetrated with the realization that, whatever he may or may not be in an oratorical way, he is a Priest of God—one whose divine commission it is to make the Gospel known. And though there may be no great degree of profundity in his thought or elegance in the form of its expression, no novelty to startle the modernist, or grace to tickle the ears of the fastidious, he feels that there is always at least a modicum of plain and wholesome doctrine; and his constant prayer and hope are that the devotedness and priestliness of his life may fill in the gaps of his manner and matter, and attain in the end the object for which he speaks and labors—the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

FATHER SPERINDE.

XXVII

IN THE CONFESSIONAL

My dear Prudenzia:

Of course, if you feel the desire for regular spiritual direction, you are perfectly free to change your Confessor; but I am doubtful (mark, I say doubtful, not certain) if the change will bring you any great satisfaction. As a general rule, a penitent whose regular Confessor rarely has anything to say, save to give absolution and blessing, will find that he will receive practically the same treatment to whomsoever he goes. And it is the penitent, not the Confessor, who is usually to blame. This may sound a bit extraordinary; nevertheless it is true—at least Priests feel that it is true.

There is no doubt but that for a great number of Priests the confessional is naturally unattractive. "There is no manifestation of self, no subtile allurements of a personal kind,

in sitting for long hours listening to the sins and sorrows and often the inconsiderate talk of multitudes, for the most part unknown." So wrote Cardinal Manning. I would go even further and say that there are Priests of nervous temperament or enfeebled health for whom the "box," with its cramped quarters, stuffy atmosphere, and prolonged tension of faculties, is a veritable penance.

Yet, notwithstanding these facts, the office of Confessor is peculiarly dear to Priests, not only because it is "as salt that keeps their priesthood sweet and wholesome," but also because it is the source of some of their richest priestly joys. To describe those joys to one who has never experienced them is not easy. But were I to try, I should say that they are of a nature akin to those experienced, as one may imagine, by the Trinity Itself. For like to the Father, there is given to the Priest in the confessional, from little children and the innocent, a filial love and confidence that pass all understanding; like to the Son, the Good Shepherd, it is vouchsafed to him to bring home, again and again, the stray and wandering sheep upon his shoulders; and like to the Holy Spirit, it falls to his happy lot, to

look into souls whose purity and holiness may be truly called a reflection of the divine.

Such being the case, there is, as you may appreciate, no Priest worthy of the name who does not bring to his task of hearing confessions the will to be as helpful as he can. While he was still young, it may be, he felt that to be helpful it was necessary for him to speak to every one who came; and therefore he proceeded to give to all, indiscriminately, sermonettes, fervorinos, exhortations. But little incidents gradually caused him to doubt the wisdom of his course; simple souls to whom he spoke of the trials and difficulties which beset all mortals tossed about on the angry sea of life would interrupt him to say that they had never been much upon the water, and were poor sailors anyway; others, having finished their act of contrition would rise from their knees while he was yet speaking, and start to leave the confessional, and again and again he saw himself obliged to break off abruptly and call penitents back for absolution; while others still would incontinently interrupt his carefully prepared discourse with a "What did you say my penance was, Father?" As a consequence, he was led in the course of time to

come to the following three conclusions: First, that there are penitents who want to be let alone and are better let alone; second, that speaking for the mere sake of saying something is profitless, both to himself and the one to whom he speaks; and third, that his office will be very adequately fulfilled if he speaks when the confession demands it and when, in his judgment, the penitent is likely to be benefited by what is said; and from these three decisions he comes, consciously or unconsciously, to divide his penitents, roughly speaking, into two classes—those who are guilty of grievous sin and those whose lives are stainless or practically so.

To the former class, especially, his heart goes out. It was of such that he dreamed in the days of his preparation, when foreseeing the wondrous power that would be given to him of binding and loosing, he imagined himself, like his Divine Master, raising the fallen and bidding them to go and sin no more. And rarely, if ever, does he allow one of them to leave the confessional without arousing him to a sense of his condition, or exhorting him to avoid this or that dangerous occasion, or encouraging him against the dejection and dis-

heartenment of repeated failures. And many a Saturday night, when he had had more than the usual number of penitents of this class, he has come in from the confessional, tired indeed, it may be, and nervous from the strain, but light of heart, and suffused with joy from the consciousness that souls have been lifted from the mire of sin and given a fresh start along the road of righteousness.

Much, however, as a Priest may love to devote himself to the needs of this class of penitents, he soon learns that it is not they but the guiltless who make up the staple in his confessional labors. But these also, though they may not call forth from him the same qualities of zeal, are no less the objects of his loving care. To those who preserve their virtue, it would seem almost miraculously, in the midst of corrupting influences all around them, he offers such suggestions and reflections as are deemed calculated to console and strengthen; while if one come to him exhibiting signs of a religious vocation he does whatever in him lies to direct him on his way. In this connection, however, I would say, by way of parenthesis, that signs of a religious vocation, especially among young women, are not quite so easy of

discernment nowadays as formerly. Fifteen years ago a girl with yearnings for a more than ordinary intimacy with the Lord could hardly find satisfaction unless she withdrew to the hallowed precincts of the cloister. But in these days it is possible for her, without sacrificing home ties, or friendly attachments, or even innocent worldly amusements, to secure at least a modicum of that satisfaction in the universal practice of daily communion; and with that modicum she becomes content, soon exhibiting no more vocational marks than the girls kneeling by her side who, though truly devout, have never felt the interior yearnings which are proof of the elect.

But to return to our sinless penitents: they are not all of the struggling or aspiring order. Nay; by far the greater number are of a routine goodness which puts out no hook on which to hang a rebuke or exhortation or spiritual refection. And, Prudenzia, I would have you know that it is not easy "to strike new sparks forever out of the hardy perennial type of imperfection, such as distraction in prayer, greediness, or want of charity"; nor is it possible each month to bring forth a fresh fervorino on the marvels of the first Friday de-

votion. Occasionally the Confessor may, even to this type of penitent, enlarge on such features of an approaching feast or particular Christian virtue as appeal especially to himself; but most of the time he can only be silent, marveling, with Cardinal Manning, "that people should be so good and yet no better; that they should do so many good acts, and yet not do more; that they should have so few faults, but so few excellencies; that they should be so blameless, but deserve so little praise; so full of good feeling, but so spare in good works; so ready to give, but so narrow in their gifts; so regular in devotions, yet so little devout; so pious, yet so worldly; so ready to praise the good works of others, and yet so hard to move to do the like; so full of censures of the inertness and inconsistency, omissions, faults and lukewarmness of other men, and yet so unhelpful and soft and unenergetic and lukewarm themselves."

However, Prudenzia, Priests, whether they speak frequently or only rarely, have always, as I have already said, at least the will to be helpful; and the deeper chords of their spiritual natures are almost certain to be set vibrating by evidences in the penitent of "saintly liv-

ing and silent humbleness," resulting in utterances that are sure to inspire and console. See to it, therefore, that such qualities are evidenced in you, and you will experience for yourself the truth of what I say. But even if you should not, do not be disturbed. Too great a solicitude in this matter is often the sign, not of genuine spirituality, but of vain religiosity. Take what is given, and you will undoubtedly find in the end that no sincere spiritual longing will be left unsatisfied.

FATHER SPERINDE.

XXVIII

AT THE ALTAR

My dear Prudenzia:

There are certain little offices of the priesthood which, though within the province of all Priests, do not fall to the lot of all to perform. There is nothing especially exalted about them, nor do they serve in any way to attract public notice; but they are invested with a sweetness and charm that make them peculiarly attractive, and cause Priests to look forward to their accomplishment with not a little pleasureable satisfaction. One of them it was my privilege this morning to fulfill. I acted as assistant Priest to Father Allman at his first Mass.

The joy that I derived from this simple office is not easily described. There was, of course, the pleasure that came from being serviceable to a family that has been loyal and devoted to me ever since my first coming here. Then, also, there was the satisfaction that

comes from participating in a function which was freighted with importance not only for the young man himself but also for the countless numbers of people to whom, in the course of time, he will administer. But most of all, there were the intimate feelings that arose out of the office itself.

As I stood there, alert to correct or suggest, I saw in the young man, as in a mirror—myself; and I recalled with a vividness that held me captive how I felt on a like morning (memorable now, for time and for eternity) almost twenty years ago. How I had looked forward to that first Mass! How I had imagined that somehow or other it could never be—that something must happen, an accident, possibly, whereby I would lose an arm! How painstakingly I qualified myself for it! How earnestly I prayed! But nothing happened. The day dawned like yesterday and the day before; and with a calmness that surprised and even shocked me, I vested and passed into the sanctuary. A saintly old Sulpician Father, now dead, assisted me. But though he stood with devoted vigilance at my side, he never once obtruded his presence. Indeed, I was hardly conscious that he was there at all. I

was conscious only that here was I, yes, even I, offering up the Holy of Holies. Like one who in some mysterious way was somebody else I moved through the ceremony. Flashes, in which were revealed to me the greatness of my action, the unspeakable goodness of God in permitting me to perform it, my utter unworthiness to be there, flared through me, even as flames flare between pieces of coal when a fire is starting in the grate. But of sensible emotion, even at the Consecration, I felt but little. That came afterwards. For as men pass through dangers without being conscious of them, but on looking back afterwards are overwhelmed and prostrated, so I, kneeling in the sanctuary when Mass was over, looked back and was completely overcome by the wonder of it all—the unspeakable favor that had been granted me, the utter absence in me of any quality to deserve it, the boundless mercy and overwhelming loving-kindness of the Lord. And oh! what emotions surged within me—of awe, of dread, of hope, of generous resolve, but above all, of joy—delicious, elusive, irresistible joy, that flooded my whole being as with light, that transfused me as an ecstasy.

Such, Prudenzia, was my experience on the occasion of my first Mass. With little accidental variations, it was the experience of the young man this morning. Nay, it is the experience of all to whom it is given to stand for the first time before the altar—a Priest according to the order of Melchisedech. But why do I say for the first time? Morning after morning, as the Priest passes behind the veil—to share with the saints of the heavenly courts an intimate association with his Lord, to know Him at the breaking of the Bread, to speak to Him as friend to friend, to taste and see that He is sweet—the thought of how frail he is, how weak, how insignificant, how lacking in high and noble qualities, overwhelms him, casts him down, annihilates him, wrings from him cries for help and mercy; but all the while the power and sublimity of the action are flooding his soul with majesty, the odor of its sweetness is tempering the sharpness of his loneliness, the mystery of its glory is encompassing him round as with a shield, and serving to protect him from insidious and lurking dangers.

There are those who might imagine that as the Priest grew older the Mass would, through

frequency of repetition, become stale and wearisome to him. The Priest himself finds, on the contrary, that it grows more precious and ineffable with the years. And when, at length, his last illness comes, and he can say it no longer, there grows upon him a poignant longing such as filled the heart of the dear old Priest of whom Father Keatinge writes in his beautiful book on the priesthood. This old man had spent forty years as a missionary. Attacked by necrosis of the forearm, he had come to a London hospital for treatment. The surgeons had taken off his arm, and there he lay a-dying. One day, in a talk with Father Keatinge, who used to come frequently to see him, he looked up sadly, and said, "It is only when you lose it, when you can never say it again, that you know all that the Mass brings a man—at least," he added slowly, turning his face away, "at least, this side of eternity." And then, after a pause, looking up again, "I would give the other arm if only it were possible that I might say Mass once more."

And now, Prudenzia, one thought further, and I am done. I have, among a number of cards received from friends, one that I treasure with an especial fondness, a little lace-

fringed picture of a Priest saying Mass, and on it, in the handwriting of the sender, these words, "I pray that you may always serve our dear Lord best at the altar." Prudenzia, to serve our dear Lord best at the altar, that is the deepest heart-wish of every true Priest; for he knows that if he can but serve Him well there he will not be unfaithful to Him elsewhere. So, in your devotions, please, a prayer, that not only I, but all Priests, may give to the Mass our truest and most devoted service.

FATHER SPERINDE.

XXIX

PRAYING IN PRIVATE

My dear Prudenzia:

How far you are from appreciating the Priest's point of view! Why, of course I concur in your devotion to Saint Rita. When, in our conversation the other day, I stated that Priests were opposed to "new-fangled" devotions, I referred to "chain prayers" and such like extravagant practices. Surely, you could not imagine that I would include in that category authorized devotions to a saint. And, if it is indeed true that there is no cult to your "favorite saint" here, and that I myself "seem but little inclined to turn to her in times of special trial," the lack in the former instance is due simply to inopportuneness and the existence here already of several so-called popular devotions, while in the latter it is due to what I may term priestly conservatism. This last expression may convey but little definite mean-

ing to you; but it will be made clear, I trust, in what follows.

At the outset, I would say that "popular devotions" make but little appeal to the ordinary Priest. It is not that he deprecates them or fails to appreciate their value. On the contrary, he may see more clearly than anyone else their merits and efficaciousness. But his aim in practising private devotions is so different from that of the ordinary lay-person! To him they are not the pie and cake of spiritual living, but its daily bread. He indulges in them, not intermittently, as a result of special emotion, or because they are pretty and appealing, or because they are the vogue, or because he has been crushed to earth by a sudden trial and seeks the "impossible," but regularly, because they are essential to his zeal, because they are necessary for the acquisition of unction—that quality so ineffable in the administration of the sacraments—because, in a word, they help to make him more and more what, in his deepest heart, he hopes and aspires to be—a priestly Priest. Such being the case, he "takes no chances" with the "novel and the new," but focuses his efforts on the "tried and true."

His first and greatest devotion is no doubt

to the Blessed Sacrament. This is readily accounted for. The Blessed Sacrament is the source of all the Priest's dignity, all his power, all his honor, all the respect and reverence shown to him by his people. To consecrate It, he was ordained; he partakes of It as his daily spiritual food; he carries It with him, Emmanuel, to the hospitals and the homes of the sick and the dying; he guards It, holding in his custody the key of the tabernacle; his very dwelling-place is within the radiance of the light which proclaims Its presence. What wonder, then, in view of these relations, as intimate and momentous as were Mary's, as elevating and responsible as were Joseph's, as sweet and open and familiar as were the Apostles'—what wonder, I say, that the Priest should turn instinctively to the Blessed Sacrament, coming day after day, preferably in the evening, when the lone lamp of the sanctuary mitigates the church's darkness, to kneel before It, to feel the sweetness of Its presence round him, to think over the hours and actions of the day. And whether earthly friends smile, or grieve and disappoint, whether superiors sympathize, or misunderstandings follow like a shadow, whether life is bright

and cheerful, or trials and burdens cover all in darkness, he is ever certain to find, as he kneels there, in the presence of the Master, a peace and resignation that the world and all its turmoil cannot take away.

However, sweet and intimate and compelling as are the Priest's relations with the Blessed Sacrament, they by no means round out the complete circle of his private devotions. A segment, and indeed a very large segment, is taken up with the Blessed Virgin Mary. The beginnings of the Priest's devotion to the Blessed Virgin were made, no doubt, in his early years by the simple faith of a pious mother; in the seminary, too, especially on those wonderful evenings of May, in choir and cloister, it was certainly extended; but it was not until the priesthood itself was reached that it received its full expansion. Indeed, the Priest could not help but give to the Blessed Virgin a peculiar and all-absorbing place in his private devotions; he were unnatural otherwise. For, while it is true that she is the Mother of all who share in the adoption of Jesus Christ, she is in a special and distinctive way the Mother of the Priest—not only because it was to a Priest that Jesus said,

"Behold thy mother," and of a Priest that He said, "Behold thy son," but also because the priesthood itself is in a sense her creation. For what is any Priest's priesthood but a share and participation in the priesthood of Him whose Mother she is? Hence you can understand why the beads form a part of the dress of Priests in Religious Orders; and if they do not hang from the girdle of the Priest in a parish, it is not because they are any less frequently between his fingers. Indeed the Priest would almost as little think of retiring without saying his Office as without offering a chaplet to his Blessed Mother.

Of course, Prudenzia, there are many other devotions cultivated privately by Priests. In fact, there is hardly a saint that has not, to some extent at least, a Priest devotee; and Saint Rita is by no means the least among them. But those mentioned are unfailing and universal; and were there no other, the Priest could, with them, remain content.

FATHER SPERINDE.

XXX

IN HIS OWN EYES

My dear Prudenzia:

I hasten to tell you the good news. You know that for some time I have been dreaming of a trip to Europe. Well, at last, the dream is about to come true. The Bishop has granted me a six months' leave of absence, and I set sail next Wednesday for Queenstown. It has all come about so suddenly that I hardly yet fully realize all its bearings. One thing, however, is clear—our correspondence must come, for the present at least, to an end. But, really, in so far as the subject-matter of our writing is concerned, it makes but little difference; for, according to the scheme that I had laid out for myself, there remains but one topic further to discuss, and that can be adequately treated in this final letter. It relates to the Priest's attitude towards his ministry as a whole.

Were I to try to express in two words the Priest's attitude in this regard, I should say

"unprofitable servant." In no matter what direction he turns his gaze, he sees imperfections in the performance of his duties. Sick-calls, preaching, confessions—all seem to have been so much less thoroughly performed than they might have been. Above all, he sees many things that he could have done but which, through slackness or sloth or dilatoriness or procrastination or carelessness he allowed to remain undone. And the revelation fills him with sadness; for in his heart of hearts he does so much want to do and be all that he hoped to do and be, when on the ever-memorable morning of his ordination he accepted the consecration that made him the light of the world, the salt of the earth, the image of the Son of God, a shepherd of the sheep. And he cries out with Saint Paul, "A faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief. But for this cause have I obtained mercy; that in me first Christ Jesus might show forth all patience, for the information of them that shall believe in Him unto life everlasting."

"An unprofitable servant"—and he strikes his breast, asking the Lord to give him still more time and still larger opportunity to make

up for past delinquencies. His hope is in the mercy of the Lord and in the interest of her who is peculiarly his Mother in the order of grace. "Lest in saving others," he says to himself, "I myself should become a castaway." "Lest having given up all things to follow Him, I should be found in the end to have sought only myself." "Lest having been made great, I should turn out at last to be a pigmy." Especially as he grows older, and the grave draws nearer, do these thoughts rush in upon him. Not that he really fears death. He daily casts up reckoning for himself and his flock, and he possesses unbounded confidence in the loving-kindness of Him with Whom and for Whom he labors. But the Holy Spirit has taught him to see with especial clearness the sanctity of God and the sinfulness of sin; and he cannot but view with trepidation the prospect of that awful transit from this dim world to the presence of that great white Throne in whose brightness no spot, no matter how slight, shall remain unrevealed.

Yes, Prudenzia, the Priest is ever penetrated through and through with the realization of the magnitude of the tasks which have been accepted by him and the seeming inade-

quacy of their performance. And I would ask you, ere closing, to remember that fact. I do not ask commiseration. The Priest feels no need of that. His position is one of glory and honor—the source of exultation such as was expressed by the Blessed Virgin herself, when in her ecstasy she cried, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." But he does desire that it should not be forgotten that, if his tasks are supernatural, he himself is only of clay—of the same poor, weak clay as any other man; and that no matter how high he may aim, the target is ever and always so far above him that, try as he will, he can do no more than strike its outer ring. He asks not that his weaknesses should be condoned, or that his sins of omission or commission should be overlooked; but he would hope, as he strives and struggles and daily reconsecrates himself, that the wrinkles of his alb might not be taken for stains, or, to speak more plainly, that evidences of innocent human characteristics might not be regarded as a reflection on his priestliness.

Also, Prudenzia, he asks for prayers—prayers that he may go forward bravely and not falter, that he may prudently avoid the

snares and pitfalls that lie so thickly in his path, that he may accept with submission and resignation the misunderstandings and false judgments to which his position exposes him, that he may be patient and forbearing in the face of unkind criticism and contradiction, that he may be humble and holy and serviceable and zealous—a faithful follower, if only at a distance, of the great High Priest, his Lord and Master.

But I must close. Other things, preparatory to my departure, are calling me; I must attend to them. So, good-bye, Prudenzia, and, as a final word, God bless you!

FATHER SPERINDE.

PRINTED BY BLASE BENZIGER & CO., INC., NEW YORK

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